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ALFRED TENNYSON

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*a. Lennyson.*







# Alfred Tennyson

## A Saintly Life

BY

ROBERT F. HORTON

*Formerly Fellow of New College  
Oxford*



1900

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6

MW



Live thy Life,  
    Young and old,  
Like yon oak,  
Bright in Spring,  
    Living gold ;

Summer-rich  
    Then ; and then  
Autumn-changed,  
Soberer-hued  
    Gold again.

All its leaves  
    Fallen at length,  
Look, he stands,  
Trunk and bough,  
    Naked strength.



## Preface

TENNYSON was once stirred to wrath by an old lady who had some traditional memories of Dr Johnson which were not altogether to his advantage, as "that he stirred his tea with his finger and that not clean." We should relate nothing unworthy of great men, he declared. He disputed the right of the world to search into the foibles and peccadilloes of its celebrities, denying the justice of the French proverb, *Tôt ou tard tout se sait*. "The surface of the *tout* may be, but the *tout*, never is, correctly known. If one knew all one would pardon all, is much more likely to be the truth." "The poet's work is his life," he would say, "and no one has a right to ask for more."

It seems then an obligation of honour in writing of Tennyson, to decline the gossip of curiosity or malignity, and to rest content with the facts which are revealed by a biographer "who wholly loves the man whose life he writes, yet loves him with a discriminating love" (*Tennyson: a Memoir*, ii. 165).

I have felt it better, therefore, and it is quite sufficient for the purpose, to take Tennyson in the main as he appears in that *Memoir* which a devoted son

compiled in four arduous years, under the eye of that wife who was Tennyson's most faithful critic and truest friend, and with the aid of the living recollections of distinguished men who had known him long and intimately.

The writer had no personal knowledge of the poet ; and he has felt at liberty to set off against all the criticisms and detractions, which may have gained a dubious currency, the deliberate opinions of such men as Jowett, Aubrey de Vere, and Palgrave.

If it be objected that when the Life is already recorded in so adequate a fashion, it is superfluous to write a book which stands in such a relation to the authoritative volumes, the answer is two-fold.

In the first place, the two large volumes of more than a thousand octavo pages can hardly come into the hands of the general public. And further, the material there collected is rather a quarry from which to dig, than a life in the ordinary sense of the term. Though all is interesting, all is not essential to the understanding of Tennyson ; and some of it might be tedious to readers who would yet gladly know what manner of man Tennyson was.

But in the second place, though no son could write a biography of his father with fuller knowledge or with more perfect taste, that taste itself imposes a certain reticence and restraint. A son may give the facts but he will hesitate to draw the inferences.



Just as reverence will disincline him to criticise, modesty will make him hesitate to praise.

For an estimate of Tennyson as a poet, some one other than a near and deeply interested relative must necessarily be sought; and in the same way for an estimate, favourable or unfavourable, of the man and of the life, one must go beyond the household circle, and see through eyes which are not veiled by the reverence and affection of years.

In all lives it is possible to know men "after the flesh," that is from a vicinity, and an intimacy, which makes a true perspective impossible. But it is necessary to know them too "after the spirit," that is, to stand a little aloof, where the judgment is not influenced by personal contact, and detachment of mind presents clearness of outline.

This study of Tennyson, therefore, from a particular point of view, an ethical, or I may even say a religious, point of view, has its justification, whatever verdict may be passed on the way in which the study is carried out.

In the *obiter dicta* judgments on the poetry of Tennyson I am most indebted to Dr Stopford Brooke's interesting and eloquent book on the subject, and to Mr Frederick Harrison's discriminating judgment in his more recent book on "Tennyson, Ruskin, etc."

ROBERT F. HORTON.

HAMPSTEAD, *Sept.* 1900.



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## Chapter I

# A Saintly Life

“ O young Mariner,  
You from the haven  
Under the sea-cliff,  
You that are watching  
The gray Magician  
With eyes of wonder,  
*I* am Merlin,  
And *I* am dying,  
*I* am Merlin  
Who follow the Gleam.”

THE Mariner it should be observed is the poet ; and Merlin is the world-old spirit of Poesy ; and the Gleam is that elusive truth or beauty which it is the function of the Poet to seize and to express. The poet's life must be the dutiful following of the Gleam. And if he dutifully follow it to the end, his life becomes apart from his poems, a fresh contribution to the sum of devoted lives which constitute the value and the purpose of humanity. The life we are to study is such a following of the Gleam.

But, since there are catalogued in the British Museum two and fifty books on the subject of Tennyson, a writer who offers a fifty-third is bound

to give a reason, or at least an apology, for his undertaking. That reason or apology he will present on the first page, that no reader may be led into the pages which follow on a false plea or with a delusive expectation. The *motif* of this book is suggested in the title of this the opening chapter, A Saintly Life.

When the Memoir of the Poet written by Hallam Lord Tennyson appeared, it dawned upon some who read it that the Life was as great a poem as any that the Poet had written, and that, as a whole, it constituted a possession as precious as the whole body of his poetry. This of course a son could hardly say, though he has furnished us with the materials which sustain the contention. And yet this ought to be said, and said with sufficient emphasis to attract the attention of his countrymen who may thus reap from their great poet the noblest harvest in an aftermath. To say this, or rather to bring it out into evidence, is the object of these pages, and the writer asks the reader's help in the endeavour.

The poems of Tennyson, which most of us have known and loved from our youth upward, can now be fitted into the life, as the pictures of Perugino frame themselves in the landscape of Perugia. The life interprets the poems, while the poems illuminate the life, and the two together compose a poem, large and varied and complete. And lest a son's noble reticence or the hurry of the general reader might hinder

the recognition of the fact, it is necessary to state succinctly yet distinctly, that Englishmen have had among them in the nineteenth century, one who, according to the fine Miltonic ideal, being set on the composition of poetry, found it essential himself to be a true Poem.

As in the eighteenth century the most notable man of letters, Samuel Johnson, was found to have been greater than his writings, so that his life is a more lasting possession than any of his books; so in the succeeding century, though there has been no Boswell to record it, the most distinguished author of the time proves to have been greater in his life than in his work. A life-long friend, Fitzgerald, the translator of the Rubaiyát of Omar Khayam, once said: "I wish I had been Alfred Tennyson's Boswell." We cannot but wish that he had. But we have enough of the acts, the conversations, the minor thoughts of our poet, to serve the purpose. And not the least element of value in the life is the unconsciousness of being great, or of doing anything that the world would care to keep, which at once strikes anyone who turns the pages of the Memoir.

Tennyson used to narrate a conversation between himself and Samuel Rogers. "One day we were walking arm in arm, and I spoke of what is called Immortality, and remarked how few writers could be sure of it. Upon this, Rogers squeezed my arm and

said: 'I am sure of it.' Rogers was sure of his literary Immortality. Tennyson was not sure of his. Unlike Horace, or Dante, or Shakespere, unlike indeed the majority of poets both great and small, he had a noble humility; few would allow it to be a just self-estimate. "O little bard," he wrote once to a spiteful rival,

"O little bard, is your lot so hard,  
If men neglect your pages?  
I think not much of yours or of mine,  
I hear the roll of the ages."

He heard the roll of the ages; his hearing may have been exact. It required detachment of mind, unusual even in the greatest, to say in his address to Dante, at a time when he enjoyed a fame, a universal acclamation, never accorded to that sad exile in his lifetime,

"I, wearing but the garland of a day,  
Cast at thy feet one flower that fades away."

But there is a point of view, and it is the point of view of this book, from which the humility which deprecated immortality in letters may be greater, and for that reason more immortal, than literary immortality itself.

On that memorable voyage which Gladstone and Tennyson took in Sir Donald Currie's yacht, the statesman spoke of the poet and for him, when they



both received the freedom of the burgh of Kirkwall. "He has worked in a higher field," said the statesman of the poet, "and his work will be more durable. We public men—who play a part which places us more in view of our countrymen—we are subject to the danger of being momentarily intoxicated by the kindness, the undue homage of kindness, we may receive. It is our business to speak, but the words which we speak have wings, and fly away and disappear. The work of Mr Tennyson is of a higher order. I anticipate for him the immortality for which England and Scotland have supplied in the course of their long national life many claims. Your record to-day of the additions which have been made to your municipal body may happen to be examined in distant times, and some may ask with regard to the Prime Minister, 'Who was he, and what did he do? We know nothing about him.' But the Poet Laureate has written his own song on the hearts of his countrymen that can never die. Time is powerless against him, and I believe this, that were the period of enquiry to be so long distant as between this day and the time when Maeshowe was built, still, in regard to the poet laureate of to-day there would be no difficulty in stating who he was and what he had done to raise the intellects and hearts of his fellow-creatures to a higher level, and by so doing acquire a deathless fame."

It was a touching amœbean contest in humility, and happily we have not to adjudge the prize. We may leave undetermined which will be best remembered, the statesman or the poet; but we may hazard a conjecture that both of them will command the allegiance of after ages rather for what they were than for what they did. And probably the poet heard more distinctly "the roll of the ages"; and a time may come when the poems which have been in the nineteenth century the articulate voice for England, or at least for the cultured part of England, will have lost their vogue. The severity of history reminds us how poets great and famous in their time, Waller, Cowley, Warton, have yet, as poets, been forgotten.

But the man, whose life has been piously placed on record by his son, the man who composed the poems which charmed the English ear for the better part of a century, will not, or ought not, to be forgotten. Here was a piece of living which for its heroism, its singleness of aim, its human tenderness, its Divine outlook, passes for ever into the treasure house of humanity.

Exception, however, may be taken to describing this as a saintly life. And as it is admittedly a somewhat wider use of the word 'sainly' than is generally intended, some explanation may be offered.

"His life," says Dr Stopford Brooke, "like every

faithful artist's life was incessant pursuit. The true device of the artist, as it is of the religious man in religion, is this: 'While we look not at the things which are seen and temporal, but at the things which are not seen and eternal,' and what the visible world said or offered to Tennyson, however now and then he was disturbed by the temporary and material, was in reality nothing to him. It had no influence upon his work. 'Brothers I count not myself to have attained, but I press forward,' is also as much a device of the artist as it is of the saint." We include in our use of the term 'saintly' this strenuous consecration of the artist to an ideal; for the artist's ideal is Beauty, and as the Greeks maintained though in a deeper sense than the Greeks realised, the Beautiful is the Good. Blake was not wide of the mark, if he spoke in paradox, when he said "Christianity is art and art is Christianity."

In any case, we venture to claim as saintly the life of an artist who sets before himself a noble ideal, and then, nobly and consistently lives for it, sacrificing everything to it. He may forfeit the title because his ideal is ignoble, or because he strives ignobly after it, or because he declines from the quest. But in itself—such is the contention of this series—the strenuous pursuit of an Ideal, and the self-renunciation which is involved in the pursuit, is intrinsically saintly. We are not speaking of the

saints of a church, hardly even of the saints of a religion, but of the saints of humanity in the broader sense. According to this view, all who have striven after truth, and in striving have helped that body of humanity to which they belong, are candidates for canonisation. Let the *advocatus diaboli* by all means be heard. But if they stand the test, they shall be enrolled. It would appear that the life of our poet stands the test. From early boyhood to the term of his long life, without faltering though not, as we shall see, without misgiving, he realised and exercised his sacred function of poet. No eremite of the desert, no monk in his cell, was ever more resolute in the execution of his vows. No worker for men whose work lies in philanthropy, in statesmanship, in the reform of abuses, in personal ministry, or in public teaching, ever played his part more manfully and consistently than Tennyson. His function, as he discovered early, was to be a poet. He was to be one

Who saw through life and death, through good and ill,  
He saw through his own soul,  
The marvel of the everlasting will,  
An open scroll.

It was his to read and to proclaim melodiously what he read in that open scroll. By the utterance of that, so far as he was concerned, Wisdom would "shake the world." He spared no pains to read it and to

utter it in music. He never relaxed his efforts even in extreme old age. Death found him at the task : the open scroll was still before him ; he was trying to decipher it. His was a soul with a forward trend ; it moved on ! always on ; he never supposed that he had attained, but he "followed the gleam." This is the first, the fundamental, condition of saintliness ; and a life which vindicates its claim to so high a degree of this quality may surely be called a Saintly Life.

But there is something more. While the poet consecrated his life with unflinching devotion to work at his poetry, which was, he felt, his contribution to the service of humanity, the poetry itself was, in a degree almost unexampled in England, the vehicle of a message to the time. There have been didactic poets, but Tennyson was not of their number. What is singular is, that not being didactic, he yet should be such a teacher. He could speak of his predecessor, Wordsworth, as one "who uttered nothing base." Perhaps he might have put the statement a little more strongly : certainly something much stronger might be said of him himself. Not only is there nothing base in the large volume of his works, not only is he delicate as a girl in handling the dark problems of sin, but a burden of lofty teaching, a teaching which grew clearer and loftier with the years, gives a continuity to all his work.

It is a burden of the same kind, though not of the same content, as that which came to the old Hebrew prophets. It is essentially the burden of the valley of vision.

Yet we must be careful not to charge him with what, from his own point of view, would be a reproach. He did not set out to be a teacher, nor was he even conscious of his work in that capacity. He wrought as an artist. As an artist he succeeded. As an artist he won the ear of the world. He became a teacher because he was what he was. All unconsciously his personality, his practice, his ideals, his principles, were breathed through his verse. In the long run it is himself that the great artist expresses ; the form is the result of his labour on his art, the substance is produced by his labour on himself. And when a poet, working unremittingly at his craft, so bears himself, so disciplines his thought and emotion, so toils in thought and inward aspiration, that his poetry, which is read in the first instance for its beauty, establishes its hold for its truth, we may without departing far from the usual meaning of the word claim that poet as a saint.

Without attempting at this point to go into particulars, we may mark out three master-thoughts which together composed the burden of the message. In each case, as the sequel should show, the truth was practised in his own life, and so found ex-

pression in his utterance. He was like Chaucer's parson :

“ For first he wrought, and afterward he taught.”

And he deserves the gratitude of men not so much for stating truths which others may have stated with similar emphasis, but for having given to the truths the peculiar weight which comes only from living them afresh in the special conditions of a man's own time.

The first of these Tennysonian dogmas was the sanctity of marriage. It is the peculiar temptation of the poetic temperament to glorify the impulse of love as a vagrant passion following its own sweet will. Poets tend to be troubadours. And Tennyson began his poetical work in the atmosphere of Burns and Byron and Shelley. He knew, or might have known, that to the world at large lubricity has a fatal fascination, that married love is pronounced prosaic, a subject not so much for the praise of poets as for the mirth of satirists. Illicit love is romantic ; glancing past the dull uniformity of domestic interiors, it plays like lambent flame about castle walls, the enchanted gardens of palaces, and the wild recesses of nature. With this brilliant fire a poet is tempted to play, knowing that he has there a power which can always touch and melt the hearts of men.

Tennyson threw all the glamour of poetry over married love. In this he was the true poet of the

X Victorian age, when on a throne, almost for the first time, an ideal marriage swayed the heart of a nation. And, by a great stroke of divine coincidence, his message was echoed by the other great poet of the period, Robert Browning.

This message of a lifetime was expressed in the early poem *Love and Duty*. The lovers part, lest the sacred enclosure of marriage should be invaded. Duty is first, and love is second. But that duty were first, love would not be love. The renunciation rings out a clearer and a loftier note than all the random passion and fulfilled desire which have been the breath of poetry from the days of Sappho to the days of Swinburne. The scheme of the Princess is broken upon a rock; the rock is the eternal value of wedded love. The motive of the *Idylls of the King* is what might be done if Arthur and Guinivere were mutually loyal,

“Then might we live together as one life,  
And reigning with one will in everything  
Have power on this dark land to lighten it,  
And power on this dead world to make it live,”

and the development of the tragedy is what actually resulted, the ruin of the realm, from the sin of the queen. The ancient tale becomes in the poet's hands—such is the prepossession of his heart—becomes perhaps to the detriment of its poetical value, a morality, an urgent and prophetic appeal to keep



inviolate the marriage tie. No poet ever uttered in more magical words this particular truth than Milton in the descriptions of the nuptials of Adam and Eve ; but Milton's chill experience of married life took the fire out of his lesson : the lesson itself became cold. Tennyson spoke from the depth of his own romantic and lifelong experience, when he thus made his most ambitious poem a study in the sanctity of marriage.

This theme he handled from every point of view ; its tragedies were depicted in *Enoch Arden* and in *Queen Mary* ; but his special delight was to show the mutual help and discipline of the relation between man and wife ; he loved to heal the differences at the baby's grave ; he loved to unveil the mystical trinity of husband, wife, and child. That scene at the close of *Sea Dreams* comes from the poet's heart and reaches the heart of the reader : the wife has persuaded her husband to forgive the man who has injured them, and in the blessed spirit of reconciliation clasps husband and child in her two hands :

“ And the woman half turned round from him she loved,  
Left him one hand, and reaching through the night  
Her other, found (for it was close beside)  
And half embraced the basket cradle-head  
With one soft arm, which, like the pliant bough  
That moving moves the nest and nestling, swayed  
The cradle, while she sang this baby song.

## A Saintly Life

What does little birdie say  
 In her nest at peep of day?  
 Let me fly, says little birdie,  
 Mother, let me fly away.  
 Birdie, rest a little longer  
 Till the little wings are stronger.  
 So she rests a little longer,  
     Then she flies away.

What does little baby say  
 In her bed at peep of day?  
 Baby says, like little birdie,  
 Let me rise and fly away.  
 Baby, sleep a little longer,  
 Till the little limbs are stronger.  
 If she sleeps a little longer,  
     Baby too shall fly away."

Such a passage as this is of course diverting to the cynic ; but for that reason it suggests that the writer may be a saint. No one could have written it who had not felt deeply the divine influence of a wife's charity, and all the mysterious awe of a son's cradle. Having felt it, the poet utters it with all his heart, and is perfectly indifferent if the world with a sneer pronounces him prudish. It must always be true of the saints that the world knows them not.

It is characteristic of Tennyson's simplicity and whole-heartedness in any faith that he holds, that in the *Death of Ænone* he does not hesitate to sing the triumph of wedded love, though in doing so he has to bid defiance to all the probabilities of the ancient tale. As Dr Stopford Brooke points out, a mountain

nymph of the Greek imagination, like Aenone, never dreamt of marriage and would have smiled at the mention of such a union. But Tennyson chooses to urge his great theme by representing her as united with Paris in her death :

And all at once  
The morning light of happy marriage broke  
Through all the clouded years of widowhood,  
And muffling up her comely head, and crying  
'Husband,' she leapt upon the funeral pile,  
And mixed herself with *him*, and passed in fire.

Here for a rare moment the saint prevails over the poet.

But there is a second thought which forms the burden of the message ; and it is in the constant reiteration of it that the two great poets of the Victorian age, Tennyson and Browning, are bound together, and become the two witnesses of a better time coming. Both of them have sung to one clear harp in divine tones, the master-truth that love is the greatest thing in the world.

Nor was this with Tennyson merely a theme of poetry. His heart hungered for a universal charity. He could not endure the quarrels and mutual depreciations which fill the lives of men. It was observed that he never spoke ill of men. And if the shyness of his temperament prevented him from mingling freely with those around him, he shrank from promiscuous society still more because

of its lovelessness. He might be brusque in manner : for one so famous, and sought out by men all over the world, the brusque manner was an almost necessary protection ; but there was nothing which in his heart he more admired or desired than the love of man to man. In his description of the poet he exactly describes himself, his inner feeling as he knew it.

Dowered with the love of love, the hate of hate, the scorn of scorn.

He loved love, he hated hate, he scorned scorn. The type of charity which was cultivated in his life and expressed in his verse is all the more effective because it rests rather on principle than on emotion. It is not ardent or passionate. It does not glow like St Paul's, it does not throb like that of St Francis ; it is not even tender like Hartley Coleridge's ; but it is a firm and deepening conviction that mutual respect, self-restraint, patience, consideration for one another, unselfishness, are the vital principles of conduct.

No one rouses his wrath more than Sir Aylmer Aylmer, who allows his barren pride to blight the love of his only daughter, to bring her to the grave, to drive her lover to suicide. Much as Tennyson loved the old landed-proprietor as such, much as he respected an ancient family, much as he delighted to describe the country houses of gentlemen, haunts

of ancient peace, he empties the vials of his wrath upon this representative of all these cherished traditions. All the charm is cancelled by this cruel pride. Whatever mars or conquers love, however venerable in itself, stands condemned.

It may not be noticed at first, but in all the best work of Tennyson there is observable a movement, which can only be described as a procession of Love; it is love moving from the personal and particular to the general and the universal. And nowhere is this more manifest than in the greatest poem, *In Memoriam*, where the love of the lost friend, never dying or growing cold, widens to the love of men, the love of all. He seems to realise that all personal love fades away unless it is sublimated, and brought into connection with a Love which is the principle of all being. And it is this Love, — not inappropriately called God, — which named or unnamed is the burden of all the poems, illustrated in all the charming stories, and ingrained into the very texture of the verse.

But of all the three master-thoughts in the message of Tennyson, the one which is the most constant, the one which he has made most his own, is the belief in Immortality. It chanced that the poet was called to work in a world which for one reason or another was tempted to question the survival of the soul after death. When Dante wrote, the future

life was as certain as this; its conditions and divisions were described with the utmost nicety. The mediæval poet had not, therefore, to spend his strength in proving the world to come; he could devote all his time to enforcing its lessons. But the poet of the nineteenth century found the future life regarded with incredulity, flatly denied, dogmatically disproved. In the seventies Materialism reached its zenith and began to decline. But from the earlier days of the century the spirit of Comte was in the air; and Positivism took the place of faith even in those who were no positivists. By an instinct which may be called prophetic Tennyson perceived the threats of the coming battle; he seemed to know that the crucial struggle of the century would turn on the old question, When a man dies shall he live again? If the poet had given a dogmatic answer, or rested his answer on the authority of Church or Bible, he would have been no prophet for the nineteenth century, by which most authorities themselves were called in question. If he had simply been possessed by the overwhelming personal conviction of immortality he would have carried but little weight. The first consideration for a teacher to influence doubters is that he himself should have doubted. To have fought the doubts and laid them, that alone raises the teacher to the chair of authority. But as the

man of his age he fought the battle of his age. All the doubts of the time were within him; what also was in him was the power to vanquish them. The *In Memoriam*, an argument, in the structure of the poem spread over three years, in the actual production spread over a period four times as long, the poet carries the hearts of men with him because he faces, for them, the dread question, What has happened to our beloved whom we have lost? The curious interest of the poem is, not so much that in it love widens from the personal to the universal, as that all the wastes of doubt are traversed before the rocks of certainty are reached. Though he can never for a moment *feel* that Arthur has ceased to be, he faces the intellectual possibility; he discusses all the questions of the mode and form of existence after death, and of the relation between the dead and the living. It is only as the third Christmas comes round that the peace of trust replaces the calm of despair. But the triumph is complete. It is not only a truth of feeling that has achieved it,

A warmth within the breast would melt  
The freezing reason's colder part,  
And like a man in wrath, the heart  
Stood up and answered 'I have felt.'

Reason itself has reached a resting-place, or rather the Will, the personality, has risen up, accompanied

by all its harmonised powers, to claim the throne of faith.

O living will, that shall endure  
 When all that seems shall suffer shock,  
 Rise in the spiritual rock,  
 Flow through our deeds and make them pure,  
 That we may lift from out of dust  
 A voice as unto him that hears,  
 A cry above the conquered years,  
 To one that with us works, and trust,  
 With faith that comes of self-control,  
 The truths that never can be proved  
 Until we close with all we loved  
 And all we flow from, soul in soul.

After the publication of *In Memoriam* in 1850, the stress of the conflict increased. Scientific discoveries, culminating in Darwin's doctrine of the Descent of Man, battered more and more the accepted foundations of immortality. For many years the poet's music was troubled. In the *Idylls of the King* the world seems to collapse in moral ruin and despair. Still Arthur passes, does not die; the survival of the human soul is maintained, but it is maintained in defiance of phenomena, as a fact of the Spirit. Sometimes, as in *Despair* and the *Promise of May*, the poet grew angry with unbelief; a sure sign that it had entered his own soul. But he lived through this period of baffled faith; and all the latest poems breathe a serene air of confidence. No soul ever went out into the unknown with a more tranquil hope than that which is expressed in *Crossing the Bar*.



One of the charms of the *Life*, written by his son, was the revelation it gave us of the man's faith in immortality, which is but imperfectly uttered in even the best of the poet's work. So far from the faith being a poetic fiction, it is the deep undertone of a soul which fails to fully express itself in verse. Thus it is in a letter to his wife in 1839 that he says: "To me often the far-off world seems nearer than the present, for in the present is always something unreal and indistinct, but the other seems a good solid planet, rolling round its green hills and paradises to the harmony of more steadfast laws. There steam up from about me mists of weakness, or sin, or despondency, and roll between me and the far planet, but it is there still."<sup>1</sup>

That is quite as sincere as anything said in the poems on the subject of the future life, and it is more weighty as a private and intimate utterance. In the year of the publication of *In Memoriam*, he said: "I can hardly understand how any great, imaginative man, who has deeply lived, suffered, thought and wrought, can doubt of the soul's continuous progress in the after-life."<sup>2</sup> He would quote his poem *Wages* as the expression of his own conviction:

<sup>1</sup> *Life*, i. 172.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* 321.

"The wages of sin is death ; if the wages of Virtue be dust,  
Would she have heart to endure for the life of the worm and  
the fly ?

She desires no isles of the blest, no quiet seats of the just,  
To rest in a golden grove, or to bask in a summer sky :  
Give her the wages of going on, and not to die."

Sixteen years later, when fits of gloom and depression were not infrequent, he, the most successful and honoured of men, quoting a Parisian story of one who had ordered and eaten his dinner and then committed suicide, said "That's what I should do if I thought there was no future life."<sup>1</sup>

Nothing in the poems is more impressive than the words he spoke one day in January 1869 with passionate earnestness : "There are moments when the flesh is nothing to me, when I feel and know the flesh to be the vision, God and the Spiritual the only real and true. Depend upon it, the Spiritual *is* the real : it belongs to one more than the hand and the foot. You may tell me that my hand and my foot are only imaginary symbols of my existence, I could believe you ; but you never, never can convince me that the *I* is not an eternal reality, and that the spiritual is not the true and real part of me."<sup>2</sup>

It was his household belief, maintained with unswerving steadfastness to the end, and remembered by all who came into close contact with him, that

<sup>1</sup> Vol. ii. 35.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. ii. 90.

The face of Death is toward the Sun of Life,  
His shadow darkens earth.

And though it was through his art that he obtained an opportunity of delivering this witness of immortality to the whole listening world, it was a witness which was really made impressive by his life. If he had written nothing at all, but only lived as he lived, his memory would abide among his friends, his life would be worth writing, as of one who, in an age when criticism and science were combined in an attack on that primal faith which gives dignity and hope to life, never swerved, never seriously doubted, but consistently maintained that "the *I* is an eternal reality."

In laying some stress on three tendencies which seem to constitute, in the prophetic sense, the "burden" of Tennyson, we must not ignore the manysided message of his poems, far beyond any assignable lines. A letter of gratitude from a stranger in the solitudes of New South Wales, written in 1855, gives a notion of the widespread helpfulness of the poet's work: "You must let me tell you how in a lonely home among the mountains, with my young children asleep, my husband absent, no sound to be heard but the cry of the wild dog or the wail of the curlew, no lock or bolt to guard our solitary hut, strong in our utter helplessness I have turned (next to God's book) to you as a friend, and read far into the night till my lot seemed light and a joy seemed cast around my

very menial toils: Then I have said, 'God bless the poet and put still some beautiful words and thoughts into his heart,' and the burden of life became pleasant to me or at least easy. If you are the man I feel you must be you will forgive this address: There are certain impulses which seem irresistible, and I believe these are the genuine, truthful moments of our life, and such an impulse has urged me to write to you, and I know that the blessing of a faithful heart cannot be bootless: and may He who seeth not as man seeth spare you to plead the cause of truth and to spurn foolish saws and sickly conventionalities."

He was pleading the cause of truth in many ways. By striking the chords of human emotion tenderly and reverently he was constantly rousing, or at least revealing, the better feelings of his readers. And the effect of his words was sometimes what can only be described as a conversion. Thus the lyric, *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, though it touched none of the issues in which Tennyson's specific message is to be found, nor indeed was anything but a spirited and vivid presentation of a heroic tragedy, produced at least on two occasions the most remarkable results. In each instance it was one of the heroes who survived the fatal charge to whom the words of the poet came as life and regeneration. In the one case a soldier in the hospital at Scutari, suffering from a

wound which he had received long after the battle of Balaclava, was so depressed in spirits that he could not throw off the disease occasioned by the wound. The doctor wished that the patient could be roused. In vain they tried to rouse him by speaking about the famous charge; he would scarcely reply. But one of them read the poem, copies of which had been distributed among the soldiers; the man's eye kindled; he bestirred himself; he entered eagerly into the situation, and described what he had seen. A few days after he requested that he might return to duty, as he was now in health. The doctor in giving the paper of discharge murmured: "Well done, Tennyson."<sup>1</sup>

In the other case the restoration was moral rather than physical. It was altogether a singular instance of the unseen currents which are working beyond human control in the lives of men. An American minister entered his pulpit one Sunday to preach. But instead of delivering a sermon he was moved by a strong impulse to recite *The Charge of the Light Brigade*. His congregation was more indignant than edified. But a few days after a man called on him and said: "Sir, I am one of the survivors of the Balaclava Charge. I have led a wild bad life and haven't been near a church, till by accident and from curiosity I went into your church last Sunday. I heard you

<sup>1</sup> *Life*, i. 388.

recite that great poem and it has changed my life. I shall never disgrace my cloth again." The minister in reporting the event to the poet said: "So though I may have lost my congregation I have saved a soul by your poem."<sup>1</sup>

It was, we may surmise, the man behind the poet that exercised this magnetic power over men. One day, when walking in Covent Garden, he was stopped by a rough-looking man, who held out his hand, and said: "You're Mr Tennyson. Look here, sir; here am I. I've been drunk for six weeks out of the seven, but if you'll shake me by the hand, I'm hanged if I ever get drunk again!" The writer of *The Northern Cobbler* was more than a writer. There was the saving virtue of a personality which breathed through the forms of his art. While he thought of his art, he who thought was unconsciously expressing himself in it; and virtue went out of him.

But if we may vindicate the title of saint both on the ground of an exclusive devotion to a high calling, and on the ground of the life which uttered itself in the poems, the title might also be claimed in the more specific sense in which it is commonly used. It would be enough for our purpose that Tennyson was, what Comte would call, one of the saints of humanity. But he was more; he was a saint as the word has been understood among Christians.

<sup>1</sup> *Life*, ii. 355.

Into his theological beliefs it is not necessary to enter. Reading the poem to the Rev. F. D. Maurice of 1854 you might suppose him a broad churchman of the Maurician type, as he extends his generous welcome to the anathematised prophet :

Should all our churchmen foam in spite  
At you, so careful of the right,  
Yet one lay-hearth would give you welcome,  
(Take it and come) to the Isle of Wight."

Reading the lines in memory of W. G. Ward, you might suppose him a Roman Catholic :

Farewell, whose like on earth I shall not find,  
Whose Faith and Work were bells of full accord,  
My friend, the most unworldly of mankind,  
Most generous of all Ultramontanes, Ward,  
How subtle at tierce and quart of mind and mind,  
How loyal in the following of the Lord.

But strictly speaking he is not Broad Church or Catholic. Each of these is a party badge, a signal of disunion. But in all his work, and still more in his life, he is a Christian. If he repudiates the creeds and holds aloof from the forms of Christianity; if in the seething of poetic thought the outlines of definite belief recede, as the hills are lost in the rolling vapour which marks their presence while it hides their form; that is not because he repudiates Christianity, but because he is truly Christian. Of Christianity he said: "It is rugging at my heart."<sup>1</sup> Though he

<sup>1</sup> Vol. i. 264.

believed that the life after death is the cardinal point of Christianity, and that God reveals Himself in every individual soul, and that the true idea of heaven is the perpetual ministry of one soul to another,<sup>1</sup> his Christian faith was, at its heart, definite and simple. Natural religion played a large part with him, as it must do with the poets, who are by their function the prophets of natural religion. But his faith in Christ was always manifest and sometimes expressed.

A friend once asked him, as they were walking in his garden, what he thought of Jesus Christ. For a minute he said nothing; then he stopped by a flower and said simply: "What the sun is to that flower Jesus Christ is to my soul. He is the sun of my soul."

And though it would not occur to any one to describe Tennyson as a religious poet, and fortunately for his influence that suggestion was never made, yet Milton and Herbert and Vaughan were not more occupied with religion, and with the Christian religion, than he.

In that transition of thought which has enabled earnest men at the end of the nineteenth century, notwithstanding the changed outlook of science, and the shattering work of criticism, to hold the Christian faith, with as deep a conviction as the men at the beginning of the century, Maurice, F. W. Robertson,

<sup>1</sup> Vol. ii. 420.



Kingsley, were aiding the few, while the writer of *In Memoriam* was flinging his help broadcast over the reading world. It was a great task to adapt the Christian verities, which were bound in dogmatic forms, to the expanding knowledge of a great scientific era. The teaching of theologians might have spread too slowly and arrived too late; but the "winged words" of the poet carried the truth immediately over the world. And though this element in his work may involve him in the fate of the preacher, whose work is forgotten in proportion as it has been successful, we may the more claim the poet as a saint, since he was content in the proclamation of his gospel, to lose himself in order to find himself and to save the world.

He chanced to live in a time when the world was saying with the doctor

Fresh from the surgery schools of France and of other lands.  
in rough derision of the faith which had saved the  
world:

"All very well—but the good Lord Jesus has had his day."

His reply was a query

"Had? Has it come? It has only dawned. It will come by  
and by."

He found himself proclaiming in many ways the  
doctrine of

"The Christ that is to be."

In this sense it was not only a saintly life, but the life of a Christian saint. And though we are slow to believe that he can be a saint in the eyes of Heaven, who has been applauded, rewarded, and crowned with a coronet here, it is a fact, which every page of the biography reveals, that he lived in austere retirement from the world's approbation, and retained the simplicity, the love of the poor, the delight in humble hearts, which are the marks of the Christian saint. If Louis IX. of France was canonised, though he wore a crown, Tennyson may be acclaimed a saint though he wore the laurel-wreath of a people's poet.

We have need to guard ourselves against the conventionality of saintship. Nothing creates the pose in sanctity so rapidly as to identify holiness with the hair-shirt, the voluntary austerities, and the haggard face of the ascetic. These things, though no marks of goodness, are easily assumed. Tennyson had the greatest contempt for them. To be called a saint like Simeon Stylites would have struck him as an insult. If saint at all, he would be Telemachus, who dashed into the arena, to stop for ever the carnival of death,

Slipt and ran on, and flung himself between  
The gladiatorial swords, and call'd 'Forbear  
In the great name of Him who died for men,  
Christ Jesus !'

The ascetic life was to him not the religious life. The quest of the Holy Grail, which stands for the "saintly life" as conventionally understood, was a delusion. If here and there a delicate maid, or a rare Sir Galahad may best serve the world in visions and formal devotions; the effort after that emasculated life will "break up the round table," divert the knights from the true chivalry, and leave the world exposed again to the irruption of the Paynim.

It is thus the saintship of the practical life, saintship as it may be achieved by a man who lives his life among men, that the poet praises and the man realises. His function as a poet demanded seclusion, but he was no anchorite. To beat out that kind of music, it was necessary to be much alone and to listen to the harmonies of Nature and of humanity a little apart from the roar of life. But he did not seek that retreat for his own consolation, or to save his own soul. He did not, in the best spirit of monkish religion, withdraw from the world to pray for it. He was a recluse only for his work's sake. To speak to his time and to reach all men, he was obliged to withdraw from the many who are always coming and going. And though such a retirement seems at the first blush to resemble that pursuit of the Holy Grail which he was the first, in the

person of King Arthur, to deplore, it will be found all through that his ideal, and essentially his practice, is to be himself Arthur, the king who with a lofty soul, coming out of the great deep and returning to it, wars against the evils of the land with a mystic sword Excalibur. He is not the visionary Galahad; though he would hail and applaud that rare apparition if he came; nor is he Sir Launcelot seeking the Holy Grail, to purge his soul of its incurred pollution. But he is Arthur, the Arthur of the Idylls in self-portraiture though unconsciously done. The world is pleased to sneer at Arthur, and finds him uninteresting because he is good. But Tennyson could not help that. He accepted the implied scorn. Vivien and Tristram, Ettarre and Modred always scorn the king.

Tennyson was Arthur. And so Tyndall saw and described him: "The sound of his voice was straightforward and brotherly. It seemed the vehicle of perfect candour of thought. He always spoke without fear or concealment, as if animated by a grand and formidable innocence."<sup>1</sup>

That description is a trait of Christlikeness.

We may study this life therefore as of the saintly order in both a wider and a narrower sense. The man came among us in the great century which began so greatly and ended so sadly, as Arthur came:

<sup>1</sup> *Life*, ii. 472.

And then the two  
Dropt to the cove, and watched the great sea fall,  
Wave after wave, each mightier than the last,  
Till last, a ninth one, gathering half the deep,  
And full of voices, slowly rose and plunged  
Roaring, and all the wave was in a flame :  
And over the wave and in the flame was borne  
A naked babe, and rode to Merlin's feet,  
Who stooped and caught the babe and cried "the King."

## Chapter II

### The Gleam : First Poems, 1809-1833

“Mighty the Wizard  
Who found me at sunrise  
Sleeping, and woke me  
And learn'd me Magic !  
Great the Master,  
And sweet the Magic,  
When over the valley,  
In Early Summers,  
Over the mountain,  
On human faces,  
And all around me,  
Moving to melody,  
Floated the Gleam.”

WORDSWORTH in *The Prelude* gave to the world spontaneously the story of his making as a poet ; and the story remains the greatest of his poems. Tennyson was always shy in talking of himself, and in place of a *Prelude*, he has left us nothing but *Merlin and the Gleam* as the record of his spiritual experience. With the aid of a biographer it is possible to pick out from his poems touches which are records of himself ; but those early years, in which the bent of the soul is given, are known to us only in a fragmentary way.

The Lincolnshire landscape, the family circle, especially the father and the mother, the Cambridge friends, and conspicuous among them the greatest and the most loved, Arthur Hallam, come before us as the influences which shaped the poet. But the poet, it is evident, was from the first dominant over the influences around him. His vocation came to him at once, and he was not disobedient to the heavenly calling.

He was born in the pastoral hamlet of Somersby, near Spilsby, on the 6th of August 1809, and even as an infant he was remarkable. "Here's a leg for a babe of a week," was the doctor's comment, a comment afterwards dramatically used in *The Grandmother*; and like so many men of genius he found the early days of life perilous; three times, after convulsions, he was thought to be dead. The home in which he saw the light was the rectory. The woodbine climbing into the bay window of the nursery, the Gothic vaulted dining-room with stained-glass windows, but above all the garden—its lawn flanked with wych-elms, larch and sycamore, and the brook which flowed at the bottom of the parson's field—took possession of his imagination and coloured his poems.

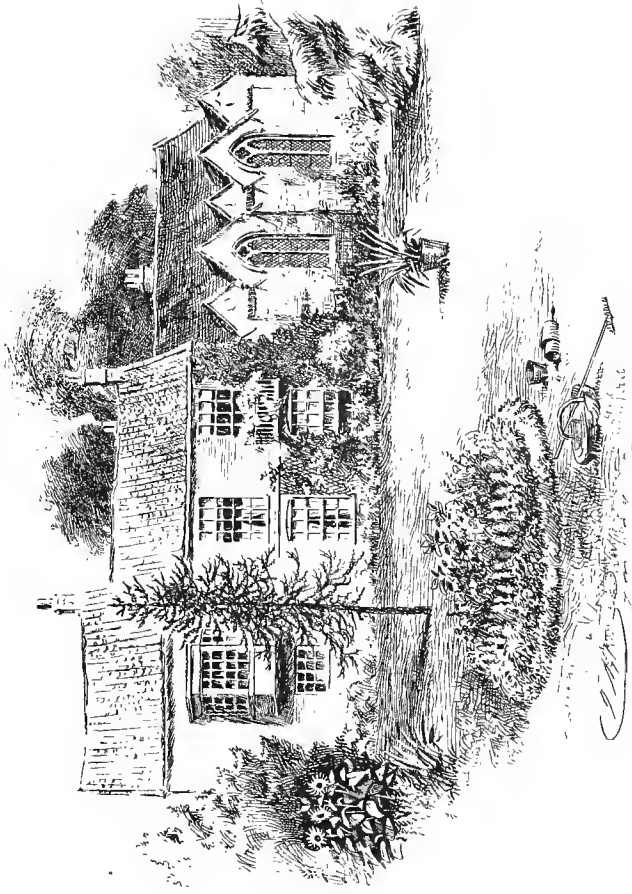
"Many years perhaps," wrote Arthur Hallam, "or, shall I say many ages, after we have all been laid in dust, young lovers of the beautiful and the true

may seek in faithful pilgrimage the spot where Alfred's mind was moulded in silent sympathy with the everlasting forms of nature. Legends will perhaps be attached to the places that are near it. Some Mariana, it will be said, lived wretched and alone in a dreary house on the top of the opposite hill. Some Isabel<sup>1</sup> may with more truth be sought nearer yet. The belfry in which the white owl sat "warming his five wits," will be shown for sixpence to such travellers as have lost their own. Critic after critic will track the wanderings of the brook, or mark the groupings of elm and poplar, in order to verify the *Ode to Memory* in its minutest particulars." The landscape was wide and level; its charm lay in its details, or in its spaces, whether of wold or sky. The imagination was not awed by grandeur, but charmed by beauty, and left free to play "on human faces" and on books.

From the earliest days, the spirit of the poet was awake within him. "Well, Arthur, I mean to be famous," was his boyish assertion to his brother. It was not the love of fame, but rather the native unchecked impulse which works in a poet's soul. Under that impulse he would rush through the gales which swept the wold, spreading his arms to the wind and crying out "I hear a voice that's speaking in the wind." He absorbed the poets that were

<sup>1</sup> *Isabel* was based on the character of Mrs Tennyson.





*The Birch place, Somerset*



within his reach, beginning with Thompson; and wrote in imitation, first of Pope, and then of Scott. He would write as much as seventy lines at a time and go shouting them through the fields. When he was fourteen, he wrote a drama in blank verse.

There were eleven children living in the family, and he was the third. The eight youngest were thrilled by the stories he told them. With one of them on his knee, two leaning against him on either side, the baby between his legs, he told them, as they listened in open-mouthed wonder, legends of knights and heroes among untravelled forests rescuing distressed damsels or fighting with dragons on gigantic mountains. He had the instinct of creation; but from the first he created for love's sake. This was symbolical of his life's work, to gather brothers and sisters about him, and to tell them his wonderful tales. He was sent to the Louth Grammar School, but the master was one who did not rule by love, and the boy got no good where love was not. He used to say that the only benefit he carried away from the school, was the memory of three sweet Latin words, "sonus desilientis aquæ," and of an old wall covered with wild weeds opposite the school windows. The lessons were to ear and eye, not to the heart. From the first he was a boy of strong and warm affection. He was not to be

influenced except by love, as by love he was to influence the world.

In 1820, when he was not yet twelve, he left school altogether, and came home to be taught by his father.

The father, George Clayton Tennyson, LL.D., was an able, conscientious man, with strong literary instincts, whose gifts were somewhat thrown away in a country parsonage, though he won the respect and even the love of his parishioners. But he was a moody and disappointed man, "daily racked by bitter fancies and tossed about by strong troubles." He was the eldest son and heir of a great estate, but his father had left the estate to the second brother who became the Right Hon. Charles Tennyson d'Eyncourt, M.P. The sense of being disinherited poisoned his days; and hardly fitted him for his duties as a clergyman. But he had great tenderness of heart, and was well able to see the promise in his gifted son. He thoroughly drilled him in the Latin poets, especially Horace, and gave him the run of his excellent library. "If Alfred die," he said, "one of our greatest poets will have gone," and "I should not wonder if Alfred were to revive the greatness of his relative, William Pitt."<sup>1</sup> But the sensitive boy was deeply affected by his father's fits of despondency,

<sup>1</sup> Dr Tennyson's greatgrandfather, on his grandmother's side, was George Pitt of Strathfieldsaye.

and more than once was driven out by grief and horror into the graveyard to throw himself down among the dead, praying to die. And it is likely that the depression from which he suffered at intervals throughout his life was his father's bequest. It was in one of these seasons of soul trouble that he wrote the prayer which survives in his boyish hand :

“O Lord God Almighty, high above all height, Omniscient and Omnipresent, whose lifetime is eternity, wilt thou condescend to behold from the throne of thy inexpressible Majesty the work of thine own hands kneeling before thee? Thou art the God of heaven and of earth. Thou hast created the immeasurable sea. Thou hast laid the foundations of the earth that it should not be moved for ever. Thou givest and Thou takest life, Thou destroyest and Thou renewest. Blessed be Thy name for ever and ever.” Then the prayer passes into an appeal for pity to Christ. “Who did leave the right hand of the Father to endure the agonies of the Crown of Thorns and of the Cross.”

But while, in quick sympathy with his father, he was thus treading the Way of the Cross, on which alone the soul can learn the lessons of service, he derived from his mother a more direct impulse to the saintly life. “My mother,” he wrote in 1833, “is one of the most angelic natures on God’s earth, always

doing good as it were by a sort of intuition." Elizabeth Fytche, of Louth, before her marriage had been one of the beauties of the county. With a true sanctity she combined a delightful humour, a pity for all things in distress, and a readiness for practical help, which it would perhaps be correct to describe as three very essential constituents of sanctity. Many of Tennyson's characteristics are explained by the story, that when she was almost eighty and rather deaf, a daughter chanced to mention that in her youth she had received twenty-four offers of marriage. She overheard, and in the spirit of historical accuracy, observed, "No, my dear, twenty-five." The poet's tenderness and reverence to his mother were always beautiful to see, and as was hinted just now in Arthur Hallam's letter, the early poem *Isabel* is partly at any rate a portrait of her.

Eyes not down-dropt nor over-bright, but fed  
 With the clear-pointed flame of chastity,  
 Clear, without heat, undying, tended by  
 Pure vestal thoughts in the translucent fane  
 Of her still spirit ; locks not wide-dispread,  
 Madonna-wise on either side her head ;  
 Sweet lips whereon perpetually did reign  
 The summer calm of golden charity,  
 Were fixed shadows of thy fixed mood,  
 Revered Isabel, the crown and head,  
 The stately flower of female fortitude,  
 Of perfect wifehood and pure lowlihead.

The world hath not another  
(Tho' all her fairest forms are types of thee,  
And thou of God in thy great charity)  
Of such a finished chastened purity.

It is natural that when a man has seen the ideal of saintliness in his mother he should grow up to recognise sanctity, not in the cold purity of the cloister, but in "perfect wifeness and pure lowliness."

The world has been only too willing to recognise holiness in the renunciation of the purest human love, and to forbid marriage in the pursuit of goodness. It was one of the moulding influences of Tennyson's life that his earliest home delivered him from this delusion, and taught him to see the most beautiful chastity in "the queen of marriage, a most perfect wife."

In rude ages, before marriage is sanctified by being treated as a symbol of the union between Christ and His Church, virginity is exalted as the true purity. But it is impurity that conceives such an ideal. The higher truth is that which the poet saw and consistently celebrated. The ascetic ideal is at the best but a sad thought in bad times. As it is the product of an impure age, so it adds to the impurity of the age which succeeds. It was to be not the least of the lessons to his time, that Tennyson from the first saw Paradise regained not in a monastery but in a home.

From his mother the boy inherited a love of creatures, which awoke in him a scientific interest. His early verses were full of observations of the ways of animals. He had even some of that power which comes to simple and strong natures of taming wild animals. In his own little attic in the rectory he learnt to imitate the cry of an owl, and a young bird came to him, nestled up to him, fed out of his hand, and finally became an inmate of the house. The stars also fascinated him, and one of his most pregnant sayings in boyhood was the result of his reading in astronomy. His elder brother Fred was shy of going out to a party, and the counsel from the young astronomer was as effectual as it was unusual. "Fred, think of Herschel's great star patches and you will soon get over all that." It was advice which he followed himself, and he gave to observers, as he wandered over the wold or by the brook, the impression of "a mysterious being, seemingly lifted high above other mortals, and having a power of intercourse with the spirit world not granted to others."

Nor must we omit from the inspiring influences of boyhood the sea at Mablethorpe. There standing on a sand-built ridge which he thought of as "the spine-bone of the world" he heard the plunging seas, nowhere more impressive than on those wide level shores, which "whiten for half a league" with each





Among the moss-grown branches and threw back  
Your floating hair . . . .

You'd tell me you were great

Already in your birth.

*Carl.*

Ha ! by St James,

Mine was no vulgar mind in infancy.<sup>1</sup>

The earliest letters which survive are amazing. One written to his aunt at the age of twelve is a remarkable criticism of Milton's *Samson Agonistes*. It ends: "In line 147 'the gates of Azzar'; this probably, as Bp. Newton observes, was to avoid too great an alliteration, which the 'gates of Gaza' would have caused, though (in my opinion) it would have rendered it more beautiful: and though I do not affirm it as a fact, perhaps Milton gave it that name for the sake of novelty, as all the world knows he was a great pedant. I have not at present time to write any more: perhaps I may continue my remarks in another letter to you; but (as I am very volatile and fickle) you must not depend upon me, for I think you do not know anyone who is so fickle as Your affectionate nephew, A. TENNYSON."

The other surviving letter of the boyhood is one to his sister's governess in which he sustains the character of Don Quixote, writing to Dulcinea: "Accept then, soul of my soul, these effusions, in which no Ossianic, Miltonic, Byronic, Milmanic, Moorish, Crabbic, Coleridge, etc., fire is contained."

<sup>1</sup> *Poems by Two Brothers.*

It was this inspired boy who in 1827, when he was not yet eighteen, produced in conjunction with his elder brother, afterwards known as Charles Tennyson Turner, the *Poems by Two Brothers*. Jackson, a Louth bookseller, agreed to publish the little volume, and offered the poets £20, though more than half was to be paid in stock from the shop. On the afternoon of the day of publication the two brothers went to the wide shore at Mablethorpe, and "shared their triumph with the winds and waves." In the little volume the work of Charles, who became one of the most exquisite sonnet writers of the century, predominates. But when the poet laureate looked back in later years on that first attempt, impatient as he was always of his own crude productions, he indulged his boyhood with the concession, "Some of it is better than I thought it was."

In that same year, on February 20th, he matriculated at Trinity College, Cambridge; the eldest brother, Frederick, was already there, winning distinction; and now Charles and Alfred came up together. The three years at the University were one of the most powerful formative influences of the poet's life, but not, it would seem, on account of the discipline or teaching of the place. The breath of reform, which has vivified the ancient universities during the latter half of the century, was not yet

felt. And at that time—perhaps it is still the same though the breath of reform has come—the greatest educational influence of the colleges was the society of the undergraduates themselves. Nothing could have been more humorous than the first contact between the two young poets and the university whose ornaments they were to become. As they were walking down Trumpington Street in the dusk on the day of their arrival a proctor met them and demanded why they had not on their caps and gowns. The tall youth—over six feet high—not at all realising the dignity of a proctor, or knowing who he was, replied, “I should like to know what business it can be of yours, sir.” That is the delightful challenge which youth and genius unconsciously present to the hoary precedents and authorities of the world. “I remember him well,” wrote Edward Fitzgerald, “a sort of Hyperion.” Six feet high, broad-chested, strong-limbed, his face Shakespearian, with deep eyelids, his forehead ample, crowned with dark wavy hair, his head finely poised, his hand the admiration of sculptors, long fingers with square tips, soft as a child’s but of great size and strength. What struck one most about him was the union of strength and refinement. The shrewdest man in Cambridge, Thompson, afterwards Master of Trinity, said at once on seeing him, “That man must be a poet.” His eyes were beautiful and

wonderful, though the sight was short ; but his ear was preternaturally keen ; he could hear, so he used to say, the shriek of a bat. His voice was, as Carlyle said, like the sound of a pinewood. His muscular strength was extraordinary. "It is not fair, Alfred," said Brookfield, the wittiest of his set at Cambridge, "that you should be Hercules as well as Apollo."

This was the kind of man who might safely challenge the old-world traditions of the university ; for he was bound to be, and presently was, the hero of his day at Cambridge. He was built on a grand scale, and it may not have been altogether the fault of Cambridge that he did not fall into her grooves, and that he afterwards looked back upon it without gratitude—

You that do profess to teach  
And teach us nothing, feeding not the heart.

That was how he thought of Cambridge. It was the old cry ; a place without love, a teaching which did not spring from love or lead to it, was for this fervent and aspiring nature practically useless. It says something for the wisdom of the proctor on that first night that he did not further molest Hyperion ; and for the wisdom of Whewell that he let the youth follow his own bent, and read Virgil under the desk during his mathematical lectures. And it speaks volumes for Tennyson and his set that on one occasion when Whewell was saluted

with derisive shouts of "Billy Whistle" (his nickname), there were three undergraduates who raised a cheer for him. "I was sorry to see, Mr Tennyson, that you were at the head of that disorderly mob," said the tutor. "My friends and I," was the reply, "were not at the head of the mob, we were cheering you."

In his second year he won the Prize Medal for English verse. It was his one academic distinction and it is doubtful whether he was proud of it. He ventured to send in a copy of blank verse, and to forsake the rhymed Alexandrines which tradition required. And there used to be a story that against many of the lines one examiner had put marks of interrogation which the other examiner took to be a number of g's, to stand for *good*. But when the prize had been awarded, it was discovered that the apparent g's were really queries whether the lines could stand at all. This however is probably apocryphal, for *Timbuctoo* is in every way a remarkable poem. At any rate Tennyson refused to recite his verses, leaving it to Merivale (afterwards Dean Merivale) to recite them for him, and some years later he assured a publisher that he could have wished that poor *Timbuctoo* might have been suffered to slide quietly off, with all its errors, into forgetfulness. Yet Arthur Hallam was able to discern in it the signs of promise. "The splendid imaginative

power," he wrote to W. E. Gladstone, "that pervades it will be seen through all hindrances. I consider Tennyson as promising fair to be the greatest poet of our generation, perhaps of our century." The imaginative power is in the conception even more than in the workmanship. The poet takes Timbuctoo to be the city of dreams, the city, first fancied in the far west as New Atlantis or Eldorado, and then transposed in imagination to Africa, the Ideal World which always recedes from our approaching feet though not from our searching eyes.

But the mention of Hallam leads us to what was the great influence of Cambridge on the poet's mind. There was at the university in those years a group of remarkable men, who instinctively gathered round such a man as Tennyson—Spedding, the famous editor of Bacon, Lord Houghton, Archbishop Trench, Dean Alford, Thompson, afterwards the Master of Trinity, Dean Merivale, Charles Buller were in the set. And it is difficult to imagine a more remarkable confraternity at any period of the history of Cambridge. Philosophers, poets, wits, historians and divines were there united in what Tennyson afterwards called "those dawn-golden times." To live among such men for three years at the period of life when hope is exuberant, and genius sees no limit to achievement, is in itself the greatest spiritual influence which can be brought to bear on a young

man's mind. Tennyson did live among them with all his soul, and they recognised him, and saw in him a singular combination of Johnsonian common sense and rare power of expression. Very genial, full of enjoyment, sensitiveness, humour, with the passionate heart of a poet, sometimes feeling the melancholy of life, he was the centre, if not the leader of their thought. And yet there was one among them whom they all regarded as their unquestioned superior. With no affectation of humility Tennyson himself felt small in the presence of Arthur Hallam.

The son of the great historian was born on February 1st, 1811, and was therefore two years the junior of the friend who has immortalised him. The love which bound these two together is one of the most exquisite things in our literature; and it has a deep religious significance for the life which we are studying. Of either it might be said that to be loved by him was in itself a mark of distinction. Since we know Hallam chiefly through Tennyson's reverent and loyal love, we are accustomed to feel that he must have been the greater of the two. But Hallam's reverent and loyal love for his elder friend was just as notable; and we are still left to question which had the advantage in that marriage of equal minds. Hallam in a single sentence sets off against Tennyson's self-depreciatory comparisons this counter



self-depreciation: "I whose imagination is to yours as Pisgah to Canaan, the point of distant prospect to actual possession, am not without some knowledge and experience of your passion for the past."

But while the genius might be equal, there was in Hallam a maturity of spiritual knowledge, such as is frequently found in gifted souls that are to die young, which made him an unconscious teacher—even to elder men. It is an irreparable loss that Tennyson's letters to Hallam were all destroyed; in them we might have read the very secret of the poet's heart during those undergraduate days. But a few of Hallam's to Tennyson have survived; and the note of the spiritual teacher is discernible in them. Here is an example. "You say pathetically, 'Alas for me! I have more of the beautiful than the good!' Remember to your comfort that God has given you to see the difference. Many a poet has gone on blindly in his artist pride." The remark lets in a flood of light on Tennyson's aspirations; and its justice is unmistakable. He goes on: "I am very glad you have been reading Erskine of Linlathen. No books have done me so much good as his, and I always thought you would like them if they came in your way. His doctrine may not be the truth, but it may contain it still, and this is my view of the case."

It was that time of promise before the Oxford

Movement, when it seemed possible that the century was to be an unchecked march of liberty and religion moving hand in hand. And these young minds, conscious of the forward movement within them, were thinking out the truths of religion with freshness and power, convinced that there was a liberty in which they must stand fast, if religion itself was to prevail.

In Cambridge there was a society which had been founded by Frederick Denison Maurice. It bore the ambitious name of the "Apostles." Of this apostolate Tennyson was a member, and Hallam was the inspiration. Politics, religion, philosophy, were freely discussed; and the influence which emanated from it may be judged by this one sentence from Hallam's paper on Prayer: "You ask how I am to distinguish the operations of God in me from motions in my own heart? Why should you distinguish them, or how do you know that there is any distinction? Is God less God because He acts by general laws when He deals with the common elements of nature? . . . That fatal mistake which has embarrassed the philosophy of mind with infinite confusion, the mistake of setting value on a thing's *origin* rather than on its character, of assuming that *composite* must be less excellent than simple, has not been slow to extend its deleterious influence over the field of practical religion."

It was during the undergraduate days in 1830, when he was just of age, that Tennyson published his first volume of poems, entitled *Poems chiefly Lyrical*. The pecuniary reward for this volume was £11. But a number of discerning minds recognised at once the new voice. Dr Stopford Brooke has shown that while the excitement which prevailed at that time in the nation lies behind these poems, the poems themselves are personal. They echo the religious thought which found expression among the Cambridge 'Apostles.' There is a sense of religious revival in them, a forecast of reality and fire in the faith that is held and in the way of proclaiming it. Curiously enough Coleridge did not recognise the underlying meaning of this volume; perhaps he hardly gave it a serious reading. But Arthur Hallam was confident: "I have full faith that he has thrown out sparks that will kindle somewhere, and will vivify young generous hearts in the days that are coming to a clearer perception of what is beautiful and good."

The truth is, there was something of the prophet in the young poet's spirit. One of the unpublished poems of the period begins:

O God, make this age great that we may be  
As giants in thy praise! And raise up Mind  
Whose trumpet-tongued aerial melody  
May blow alarum loud to every wind,  
And startle the dull ears of human kind.

The passion of reform, of progress, of benefiting mankind was working within him. The mantle of Shelley had fallen upon him, but with it had come the wisdom of Wordsworth. Selfishness, lovelessness, must be overthrown; but the weapon of warfare must be spiritual; the method must be to develop unselfishness and love positively. The wild preaching of St Simon was repulsive to his sober judgment. He saw the future already opening up, not by revolution but by evolution, and

Freedom slowly broadening down  
From precedent to precedent.

In the summer of this year the two friends started off to support the Spanish insurgents under Torrijos, who had risen against the ecclesiastical and civil tyranny of their Government. It was an exact parallel to Wordsworth's eager visit to France in the dawn of the Revolution, and to Byron's passionate sympathy with Greece. To the young poet freedom is the breath of life, and tyranny seems worse than death. It was fortunate for us that our poet did not perish with the fifty-six insurgents who were executed on the esplanade at Malaga. Boyd, John Sterling's cousin, was among the sufferers.

Though the visit to Spain did not promote Spanish liberty it filled his mind with the lovely images which occur in *Ænone*, and it gave him

the memory of Caunteretz, which found its exquisite expression two-and-thirty years later, when, with another dearer companion, he revisited the valley and recalled the revered and loved companion of his youth.

For all along the valley, down thy rocky bed  
Thy living voice to me was as the voice of the dead,  
And all along the valley, by rock, and cave, and tree,  
The voice of the dead was a living voice to me.

The voices of the dead were to become in the truest sense the living voice to the poet. He was just entering that valley of the shadow of death, out of which he emerged, "baptized for the dead," to deliver a message which was to be for innumerable souls a comfort in sorrow and a lively hope in loss. Never was a young life more suddenly and darkly shadowed; but never was shadow used more gloriously in the service of light.

In February 1831, he left Cambridge for good. He was summoned home because his father was ailing and his mother needed him. And one Wednesday morning in March, shortly after eleven o'clock, his father was found leaning back in his study chair. He had passed quietly away. The troubled and worried life had ceased.

Once through mine own doors death did pass.

That first intrusion of death within the home-

circle must always be a crisis in a young man's life. And when it comes just at the threshold of manhood, it is sure to produce a lasting effect. Either it deadens the soul with the injunction to pluck the brief and fading flowers of life because the time is short, or it quickens the soul with the summons of Eternity and a sense of God and life which never wholly passes. This was the effect on the young poet. A few days after the event he slept in the dead man's bed, in order to see his ghost. But it was in vain.

He will not smile—not speak to me  
Once more.

This was the first taste of death ; but a much more bitter cup was to follow. Fortunately the new rector allowed the Tennyson family to continue in the rectory, so that the old home remained unchanged until 1837. And for two years life was enriched with the growing friendship of Arthur Hallam, who was now engaged to Emily, the second sister. The visits of the happy lover from the busy town to the quiet rectory in the Lincolnshire wold gave occasion for those beautiful descriptions of summer afternoons with the poets, and of summer banquet in the woods, and the home-coming at evening, which are among the most imperishable pictures of *In Memoriam*. Hallam's "bright angelic spirit and his gentle chivalrous manner" made him indispensable not

only to the beautiful girl who had promised to marry him, but to that elder brother, whose strong and passionate nature clung to one who hardly needed to be idealized, being naturally ideal.

The tie which bound them together was strengthened, not only by these vacation visits to Somersby, but by a delightful tour on the Rhine, which they enjoyed together in the summer of 1832. Both of them were filled with literary projects, Tennyson publishing a new volume of poems, while they were already debating at the Cambridge Union "Tennyson or Milton, which the greater poet," Hallam writing biographical and other essays which had an extraordinary distinction for a youth of twenty-one. Both of them were intensely and eagerly interested in the throbbing life of the world, discussing questions of Church and State, the misery of the people, the visions of St Simon and of the reformers. It was a fellowship on a lofty plane. Art was great, but life was greater. The two young Anakim were sallying out to reform the world. They built their souls a lordly pleasure-house; but from the first they were assured that in it there was no pleasure except in the memory of those who suffered, and in manful struggles to redress human wrong. "Where the ideas of time and sorrow are not," wrote Hallam, "and sway not the soul with power, there is no true knowledge in poetry or

philosophy." It is one of those visions of heroic youth which must abide as a possession for the world, Tennyson with his voice like the sound of a pinewood and "the grandest head of any man," as Fanny Kemble said, "whom she had clapt eyes on," and Hallam with his astonishing range of knowledge and eloquence

And over those ethereal eyes  
The bar of Michael Angelo,

panting for the progress, the liberty, the improvement of mankind.

When the Reform Bill passed the young enthusiasts in Somersby rectory sallied out and set the bells clashing in the steeple. The parson ran in infuriated by the noise, but probably shrank from the assertion of his Tory principles in the presence of the young giants of Liberals who were thus resolved to "Ring out the old, ring in the new."

Noble hopes for the world, and interest in great movements, elevate and purify a private friendship. Comrades in the mere games of life can never be so united, because they can never be so exalted, as the combatants and brothers-in-arms in the world's great battles. And by the wealth of their genius, and the broad sweep of their interests, these two were locked together in an immortal union.

In one of the later letters we find Hallam trying to break the force of that savage criticism which tor-



mented the sensitive heart of his friend, by words which are a model of tenderness and wisdom : " They little know that you despise the false parts of your volume quite as vehemently as your censors can, and with purer zeal, because with better knowledge."

It is not difficult to see how inestimable is the love of a friend who can speak in this way, or how rare a spirit it was that at twenty-one would think of speaking with such mingled discrimination and sympathy.

But this inspiring comradeship was to be broken. It was not to be lost. On the contrary, it was to be transmuted into a spiritual form in which it could rise easily into the realm of the eternal. Nor is it possible to imagine that if Hallam had lived he could have left a greater monument behind him than the impression which he had made on his unforgetting friend, or that the friend, with Hallam at his side, could ever have written anything so great as the passionate and inspiring memorial of his absence. Hallam was permitted to see the new volume of 1832 which contained poems already known and loved among the inner circle, *The Lady of Shalott*, *Ænone*, *The Palace of Art*, *The May Queen*, *The Lotus Eaters*; and those grand chaunts of Freedom and Patriotism which struck a new note in England, by identifying the glory of the country with her Liberties so painfully secured, and with that ordered progress in which she stood unrivalled among the countries of the world.

Not the least beautiful of these new poems was one sent to James Spedding in the hope of consoling him on the loss of his brother. The poet mentions that "in grief he was not all unlearn'd," since two years before his father had gone ; and it seems to anticipate by its tender melancholy a loss that was drawing near.

It was Spedding who wrote, June 21st, 1832, "We talk out of *The Palace of Art* and *The Legend of Fair Women*. The great Alfred is here in Southampton Row, smoking all day." And it was Spedding who said of the new poems ten years later, "The reception, though far from triumphant, was not inauspicious. . . . The admiration and the ridicule served alike to bring them into notice. . . . The superiority of the second collection of poems lay . . . in the general aim and character. His genius was manifestly shaping a peculiar course for itself and finding out its proper business ; the moral soul was beginning more and more to assume its due predominance, not in the way of formal preaching (the proper vehicle of which is prose), but in the shape and colour which his creations unconsciously took, and the feelings which they were made insensibly to suggest."

This was the last public effort of his friend which Arthur Hallam was to see. Henceforth unseen and unheard he was to enter into the poet's work as a "spirit far more deeply interfused."

In July 1833, Tennyson went to Scotland, but he came back to see his friend off from London. For Hallam was leaving for a tour on the continent with his father. His parting present to Emily was Pascal's *Pensées*. And among his letters are a few lines in MS. which contain a thought of his own, pregnant and beautiful :

I do but mock me with the questionings.  
Dark, dark, yea irrecoverably dark  
Is the soul's eye : yet how it strives and battles  
Through the impenetrable gloom to fix  
That master light, the secret truth of things,  
Which is the body of the Infinite God.

“Never was a more powerful intellect joined to a purer and holier heart ; and the whole illuminated with the richest imagination, with the most sparkling yet the kindest wit.” This is the description of one who knew him. He seemed to be a presence from a larger and better world ; and before he could be cramped or stained by this, he passed, drawing all thoughts and hearts after him, into the Invisible. “Hallam was a man of wonderful mind and knowledge on all subjects, hardly credible at his age,” said his friend Dean Alford. “I long ago set him down for the most wonderful person I ever knew. He was of the most tender, affectionate disposition.” He was of the kind to suggest the irrelevancy of death to human souls. And while the very notion of such a mind ceasing to be in the shock of death

revolts the understanding, there was something in the manner of his departure to strike the note which was to sound in the *In Memoriam*. It was a passing, a transition, not a decay or dissolution.

During August and the early September days came letters full of the enthusiasm of travel, rich in descriptions of cities and galleries. The last letter was dated September 6th, and contained that comparison of his friend to Titian, which in justice is the true counterpart to his friend's comparison of him to Michael Angelo. These two, if they could not be what Titian and Michael Angelo had been in the intellectual renaissance of the sixteenth, had yet their great part to play in the spiritual renaissance of the nineteenth century.

“The Gallery (at Vienna) is grand and I longed for you ; two rooms full of Venetian pictures only ; such Giorgiones, Palmas, Bordones, Paul Veroneses ! And oh Alfred, such Titians ! By heaven that man could paint ! I wish you could see his Danae. Do you just write as perfect a Danae ! Also there are two fine rooms of Rubens, but I know you are an exclusive, and care little for Rubens, in which you are wrong : although no doubt Titian's imagination and style are more analogous to your own than those of Rubens or of any other school.”

What a spur to effort, what a guide to achievement there was in letters from a friend like this ! But it

was the last word. On September 15th, after a visit to Buda, the father and son were in a hotel at Vienna. Arthur had a slight attack of ague, and remained in, while his father went out. His father on returning found Arthur, as he supposed, asleep on the couch. He was asleep; but he was not to wake; a blood-vessel near the brain had broken. On examination it was the medical opinion that he could not have lived long. That brilliant and beautiful soul was imprisoned in a body that was unequal to its energy and powers. He was athirst for love and life and achievement. "Sometimes I sigh to be again in the ferment of minds and stir of events which is now the portion of other countries," he had written from Leyton two years before. He was also athirst for truth, and for immortality, and for God. His thirst was satisfied in this quiet and painless way. Was not the conclusion of every observer who loved him inevitable:

So much to do, so little done,  
So many worlds, such things to be,  
How know I what had need of thee  
In that fair world beyond the sun?

It would be impossible to describe the effect of this loss upon Tennyson. Emily, the affianced bride, was stricken down with illness, and we see her after many months slowly recovering, "dressed in deep mourning, a shadow of her former self, but with one

white rose in her black hair as her Arthur loved to see her." On Tennyson himself, the effect was not physical but spiritual. His soul rocked to and fro like a building shaken by an earthquake; but it was shaken only to be confirmed; its foundations were settled deeper. For a moment all joy was blotted from his life, and he composed *The Two Voices* or *Thoughts on Suicide*, as the immediate relief to his sorrow. He felt that his sister needed him, and for the love he bore her beloved, he was best able to comfort her. Otherwise he would have longed for death,

Life is so full of misery,  
Were it not better not to be?

But in the darkest moment of bereavement there was an energy at work within, and he began during the first winter days the soliloquies on loss and death, and life and God, which were to issue in *In Memoriam*.

It becomes no man to nurse despair,  
But in the teeth of clenched antagonisms  
To follow up the worthiest.

The strong soul acted on this heroic counsel. Out of his unutterable grief he set to work slowly to build up, not only the noblest memorial which was perhaps ever raised to a dead friend, but also the most inspiring argument for the eternal realities of love that conquers death and of souls that rise on

stepping stones of their dead selves to higher things, which we have seen in our day. It may be true that *Lycidas* is a greater poem than *In Memoriam*; but *Lycidas* does not throb with love, nor has it made the young scholar, whose premature death it celebrates, immortal. From the human standpoint the drowned pastor leaves us unmoved and the poet slides into a denunciation of unworthy pastors. *In Memoriam* presents us with a love so passionate that the difficulty is to believe that any man could have evoked it; and it deals so vividly with the living issue of immortality in an age of doubt, that it has been like a strenuous hand guiding many through the valley of the shadow.

The question whether all the passion of love and regret must be taken as the expression of the poet's actual feeling for his friend, is worth raising. For, if he had simply played with sorrow, and worked up a fictitious grief to form the subject of a poem, it would be difficult to vindicate his complete spiritual integrity, and it is doubtful whether verse composed under such artificial conditions could convey any vital power to the mourner or even to the reader. We have obtained sufficient glimpses of the extraordinary man who evoked this monument of love, to satisfy ourselves, that the longing, the regret, the devotion, are not exaggerated.

It is true—it is the glory of *In Memoriam*, and it is

the glory of Tennyson—that the personal grief, in the course of the tranquillising years, grew calmer, and extended into a universal passion, so that the loss of one rare soul became the occasion of considering all loss and of touching all wells of comfort. It would therefore be childish to press the details of what grows into a philosophical poem on the subject of death, bereavement and immortality. But Arthur Hallam was worthy to be loved with such a passion; Tennyson was capable of so loving him. Any man who had known Hallam as well might have felt his loss as much; but he must have been Tennyson to feel it in the grand manner, to sound its depths, and to hollow out the mysterious caverns of his being that the tuneful threnody might reverberate in this Promethean fashion.

It is in loss and death that great souls are made. The saint is one of whom it can be said “he loved much.” And it was in this two-fold shock, first the sudden death of an honoured father, and then after two years of deepening intimacy, the equally sudden death of a friend who was more than a brother, that the poet’s soul was made. If he had not been “dowered with the love of love” it would not have been made. If his being had not been an instrument on which such a diapason could be played, not even the creative hand of death could have wrought a soul fit to teach and comfort and inspire a whole century.



But the saintly life is not only made by what it does ; what it suffers is of equal importance ; it is made perfect by suffering.

Every reader of *In Memoriam* is conscious of the purging and the uplifting which result from the handling of that mighty sorrow. Not only is the poet borne on to unfaltering faith in the universe, in Man and in God ; not only is he brought into vital contact with Christ, as the vanquisher of death, the strong Son of God, immortal Love ; but in that upward progress a hundred sanctities are revealed. What reasons emerge for honest thinking and for pure living ! What impulses come to brave doing, and the strenuous battle for Truth, and Progress ! This song of death proves to be the song of life. As the body of Hallam, borne by sea from Trieste, to the Severn, and buried on the windy hill of Clevedon, goes to make the violets of his native land ; his deathless spirit, carried in this high verse across the world and down the years, blooms into undying flowers of faith and hope and love. Through such sojourns in the sounding halls of death, a noble and inspired poet learns how to take up the harp of life, and touch it with the music of death vanquished, and of life and immortality brought to light.

## Chapter III

# The Croak of a Raven, 1833-1846

“Once at the croak of a raven who crost it  
A barbarous people,  
Blind to the magic,  
And deaf to the melody,  
Snarl'd at and cursed me.  
A demon vexed me,  
The light retreated,  
The Landskip darkened,  
The melody deadened,  
The Master whispered,  
‘Follow the Gleam.’”

“IT is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth.” For ten years after the death of Arthur Hallam Tennyson bore the yoke. And it was good for him ; good for him principally, because of the way in which he bore it. Those silent years in the anguish of loss, under the smart of censure, in the pinch of straitened means, in the weariness of delayed desire, years of unwavering purpose and manful battling towards the heights, years of tender thought for others, of purging friendship and uplifting love, were the making of the poet and of the man, the making of the poet because the making of the man. It is in these years when fame was hardly in sight and when life and the world

seemed chill and discouraging, that one can best understand the quality of the man; he comes out of the trial as gold tried in the furnace. We need not hesitate to admit the dross, since it was purged.

The early poems of 1830 and 1832, though recognised as full of promise by the discerning, attracted the most savage hostility of certain "indolent reviewers." The *Quarterly*, at that time "the next book to God's Bible" in the eyes of the reading public, which does not attempt to judge for itself, received the new voice with censure, and, worse still, with derision. The effect it produced may be judged from a letter of Arthur Stanley's, written in Sept. 1834, from Hurstmonceaux, in which he says that Julius Hare "often reads to us in the evening things quite new to me, for instance (tell it not in Gath!) A. Tennyson's *Poems*." The *Quarterly* had managed so to poison the public mind, that it was as much as the reputation of a man laying claim to culture was worth, to be found reading verses which it had dismissed as beneath contempt.

The young poet, who was from the first perfectly free from self-esteem, and derived little pleasure from public praise, was easily overwhelmed with public censure, and pained by any touch of injustice. In a fit of moody self-depreciation he jumped to the conclusion that his country did not want him, and he almost resolved to go and live abroad. So darkened

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and crushed was his spirit that he would have given up writing—or thought that he would—but for the faith and encouragement of his friends, friends so distinguished, so loyal, so inspiring, that it is the greatest praise which a biographer can give to him to say that he was worthy of them. Never did a great heart hunger more for love and sympathy. He was to gain the love and sympathy of the whole English-speaking world; for the present, in the scorn and depreciation of the literary judges, he was supported by the unwavering loyalty of the few.

The motive of the *Lady of Shalott*, as told by the poet to Canon Ainger, was this: "The new-born love for something, for some one in the wide world from which she has been so long secluded, takes her out of the region of shadows into that of realities." There is a certain self-revelation in the poem. We shall not be far wrong if we interpret these dark and silent years by a motive which had entered his life silently and at first almost unobserved. In 1830, when he was just of age, he was walking in the Fairy Wood near Somersby Rectory, when there came towards him, through the trees, walking with his friend Arthur Hallam, a young girl of seventeen, slender, beautiful, dressed in gray. The young man's fancy was captivated. And the young poet's spirit greeted her with the enquiry: "Are you a Dryad or an Oread wandering here?" This was Emily

Sellwood, who had driven over that spring day with her mother from Horncastle to call on the Tennysons. And thus Arthur Hallam had brought to his friend, before he left him, the one who was to take his place, to fill the vacant heart, and satisfy the longings which death disappointed. Three years were to pass before there was any avowal of love. But here at least, in that Dryad or Oread gleaming through the melancholy wood, was the influence which would lead him out of the region of shadows into that of realities. Hallam's appreciation had been the warm and creative sunshine of his genius. "*Mariana in the South*, for instance, which others judged inferior to the first *Mariana*, Hallam commended to a friend as "another poem, of which to say that I love it would be only saying that it was his. . . . When we were journeying together this summer (1831) through the south of France, we came upon a range of country just corresponding to his preconceived thought of a barrenness, so as in the south, and the portraiture of the scenery in this poem is most faithful." This large nature, demanding solitude, required also that fostering love which would value everything he produced because it was his; required some one to be a companion, though the silent companion, of his labour. Hallam handed on, quite unconsciously, his gracious task to that beautiful girl.

Undeterred, or rather stimulated, by criticism, and

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grasping afresh in sorrow his great purpose to become a true poet, Tennyson set resolutely to work. His father had left him a small sum of money which furnished him with the bare means of living; he renounced the idea of a profession, and gave himself to the unprofitable toil of composition. His eyes were looking at something beyond. He was too busy to earn a livelihood.

Mr Churton Collins in his critical study of the early poems,<sup>1</sup> has brought out two points, first, the range of reading and study which enabled the poet to lay all literatures and all ages under contribution for his work, and second, the self-criticism and the relentless toil which induced him to correct, polish, and improve the poems already written. Such poems as *Ænone*, *A Dream of Fair Women*, *The Palace of Art*, and the *Lotus Eaters*, were so recast and remodelled between 1832 and 1842, that not only were they practically new, but they remain as a lasting monument of an industry and perseverance, which are no less remarkable than the original inspiration. For it is the peculiarity of Tennyson's work, a peculiarity which he shares with the great Latin poets, Virgil and Horace, that he, like a lapidary, could always improve his poems. The labour of the file did not spoil the substance, while it indefinitely

<sup>1</sup> The Early Poems of Alfred Lord Tennyson, by John Churton Collins. Methuen & Co. 1900.

beautified the form. Mr Collins cites one instance which may serve for many. Iphigenia said in the first version of the *Dream of Fair Women* :

“The tall masts quivered as they lay afloat,  
The temples and the people and the shore ;  
One drew a sharp knife thro’ my tender throat  
Slowly—and nothing more.”

The savage criticisms of the *Quarterly* might find an occasion in a verse like that : the self-pity of “my tender throat” is a little mawkish, and the conclusion—“and nothing more,” is slightly ridiculous, suggesting the question, what more could there be? But observe how the poet’s self-criticism turned this verse into one of the most perfect—the most magical—cameos in the whole series :—

“The high masts flickered as they lay afloat ;  
The crowds, the temples wavered, and the shore  
The bright death quivered at the victim’s throat ;  
Touched, and I knew no more.”

This is indeed a glimpse into the lapidary’s workshop. Every change is not only for the better, but it is a new inspiration, a new touch of magic. The “flickered” is much more vivid ; there is a gain in putting a second verb “wavered” in the second line : “the bright death” is a marvellous Virgilian picture of the flashing knife (“all the charm of all the muses often flowering in a lonely word”), and the last line becomes a flawless description of the passing of consciousness.

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And in this labour of improvement the poet gained the courage to prune. He would cast away verses in themselves exquisite in order to secure the balance of a poem. "Every short poem," he would say, "should have a definite shape, like the curve, sometimes a single, sometimes a double one, assumed by a severed tress, or a rind of an apple when flung on the floor." Dr Stopford Brooke has well said that thus to examine the first draft of the poems and to compare it with the finished product is "to understand, better than by any analysis of his life, a great part of Tennyson's character; his impatience for perfection, his steadiness in pursuit of it, his power of taking pains, the long intellectual consideration he gave to matters which originated in the emotions, his love of balancing this or that thought against one another, and when the balancing was done the unchangeableness of his acceptance of one form, and of his rejection of another." The critic, a Celt, goes on to say that this unceltic restraint produces a want of impulse and rush in the poems. But it may be observed, that this, which may be a defect in poetry, is a fine point in character. It is as a man, a soul growing by self discipline, even more than as a poet, that Tennyson deserves to live. This impatience of all that fell short of the best, consigned many lovely verses to destruction—



the *Brook* itself, like Mr Rudyard Kipling's *Recessional*, was rescued from the waste-paper basket—but he had his reward, for at the end of the ten years' silence even the severest critics recognised the progress which his art had made, a progress, says Mr Aubrey de Vere, "The result of well-directed pains, as well as of the poet's moral characteristics and peculiarities."

The moral growth in these years is unmistakable. This builder of the Palace of Art, is grasping with a surprising vigour the truth that to have all things, and to fail of Love, is to lose all,

And he that shuts out love, in turn shall be  
Shut out from love, and on her threshold lie,  
Howling in outer darkness.

Again he gave an unconscious self-description when in a stanza cut out from *The Dream of Fair Women* he says:

So, lifted high the poet at his will  
Lets the great world flit from him, seeing all,  
Higher through secret splendours mounting still,  
Self-poised, nor fears to fall.

"What is there wanting in Goethe which Dante has?" said Fitzgerald to him one day in presence of the busts of the two poets. "The Divine" was the reply. Nothing is more noticeable in these years of stress than Tennyson's growing habituation to that atmosphere in which Dante lived.

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The contrast between the great German poet of the nineteenth century and the great English poet is presented in that one word. Goethe has the cloudless, boundless, human view. Tennyson has also the Divine.

With all the energy of his young manhood, and with a great inarticulate prayer, constantly ascending,

O leave not thou thy son forlorn,  
Teach me, great Nature, make me live.

he began to grapple with the thoughts of his time on religion, on art and nature, on politics and social improvement, that he might be the poet of these things, and exercise his calling not in trivial but in great matters.

His days were mapped out in study. For example,

*Monday*—History, German.

*Tuesday*—Chemistry, German.

*Wednesday*—Botany, German.

*Thursday*—Electricity, German.

*Friday*—Animal Physiology, German.

*Saturday*—Mechanics.

*Sunday*—Theology.

Next week, Italian in the afternoon. Third week, Greek. Evenings, Poetry. This is the manner of one who understands that to be a teacher he must be a learner. In 1834 he is full of Alcæus and Simonides ;

and then of Racine, Molière, Victor Hugo. "All the charm of all the Muses" which is one of the great characteristics of his poetry, is the result of this strenuous toil.

But it is the growth of the heart even more than that of the brain which marks the progress. He held—

An overflowing urn  
Capacious both of Friendships and of love.

The true Tennyson is found during these years sustaining that bereaved sister, Emily, to whom he is the dearest consolation for her vanished lover; undertaking the affairs of his mother and of his younger brothers and sisters; breathing hope and courage into his friends. "I cannot express my earnest gratitude for your friendship" writes one of these last, "The sight of Somersby and *your* kindness have overcome the hard-hearted stubbornness that shut up all my feelings. . . . Your very kind letter serves me every day instead of a companion." To all the friends he was always Alfred. He was a *man*, a brother. Everyone who came near to him recognised it. He cherishes grateful memories of an old Louth tutor, and urges his friend, James Spedding, in a charming humorous letter, to promote the sale of his book. "The man is mine ancient and trusty paedagogue, and moreover a good man, and one that is publishing at a loss, and one that has not too

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cloaks, wherefore it is reasonable that you should commend his book." And he runs on: "You should not have written to me without telling me somewhat that was interesting to myself (always the first consideration!) or that bore some reference to you and yours (always the second!), or lastly, without giving me some news of the great world, for know you not, I live so far apart from the bustle of life that news becomes interesting to me?" In another letter to the same friend he mentions a review which Mill was to write of his poems in a new magazine: "But it is the last thing I wish for, and I would that you or some other who may be friends of Mill would hint as much to him. *I do not wish to be dragged forward again in any shape before the reading public at present*, particularly on the score of my old poems, most of which I have so corrected (particularly *Ænone*) as to make them much less imperfect, which you, who are a wise man, would own if you had the corrections." Some of his friends were even a little anxious—but they need not have feared—that grief for his great loss, and the smart of criticism, had silenced him. "Do not continue," they wrote, "to be so careless of fame and of influence."

But he was brooding, and preparing, and above all *living*. To a friend in sorrow he writes a few lines, not for publication—

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Woman of noble form and noble mind !  
Whithersoever through the wilderness  
Thou bearest from the threshold of thy friends  
The sacred sorrows of as pure a heart  
As e'er beat time to Nature, take with thee  
Our warmest wishes, silent Guardians  
But true till Death.

*In Memoriam* was forming canto by canto in his mind, but meanwhile his object was not to publish, but to comfort. Out of a personal and self-forgetful ministry of comfort was to grow the lesson which should reach the world.

This self-restraint and self-discipline were all the more remarkable because he was sorely straitened for money. In 1835 he tells Spedding: "I have sold my medal"—it was the medal he had received for his prize poem at Cambridge—"and made money." "The journey is so expensive, and I am so poor," is a frequent complaint of those days. At Warwick he cannot stop long enough to see all that was to be seen, "as it is very expensive being at an Inn." And though a wealthy friend, like Fitzgerald, would then and always have been willing to help, it was a delicate matter to offer money to that dignified and independent soul: "I have heard you sometimes say that you are bound by the want of such and such a sum, and I vow to the Lord that I could not have a greater pleasure than transferring it to you on such occasions; I should not dare to say such a thing to a

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small man ; but you are not a small man assuredly, and even if you do not make use of my offer, you will not be offended, but put it to the right account. It is very difficult to persuade people in this world that one can part with a bank note without a pang. It is one of the most simple things I have ever done to talk thus to you, I believe, but here is an end ; and be charitable to me." It does not appear that the delicate offer was accepted.

And now the pinch for money, and the uncertainty whether his poems would ever have a monetary value, began to press him in a peculiarly painful way. On May 24th 1834, there was a marriage in the family. His elder brother Charles, who was ordained to the curacy of Tealby, was married. The bride was Louisa Sellwood ; and the bridesmaid was the elder sister Emily. The marriage is referred to in Canto xcvi. of *In Memoriam*, but what happened at that marriage is told by the poet in those simple lines :

“O happy bridesmaid, make a happy bride !”  
And all at once a pleasant truth I learn'd,  
For while the tender service made thee weep,  
I loved thee for the tear thou couldst not hide,  
And prest thy hand and knew the press returned.

We have no reason to complain that a son should observe a severe reticence about the courtship and the marriage of his parents. For him to lift the veil and show those sanctities to the world would be a

desecration. But it is one of the few disadvantages of a son being the biographer that we are not permitted to dwell on that exquisite and sustained relationship which formed the basis of one of the greatest lessons that Tennyson was to teach the world. The poems are a continual, though shy, celebration of unstained love between man and maid, between husband and wife. Since Spenser's *Epi-thalamium*, no English poet had ever thrown such a glamour over love in its purity. The poets who have found their account in illicit or unhappy love, have always been sufficiently numerous and even too popular. To the world the word domestic is equivalent to common-place; and most poets, unhappy in their love, have humoured the world. Tennyson flung the light of romance over the familiar, and the home shone with unearthly radiance.

Evidently he drew upon an inner experience, and that beautiful bridesmaid, who returned the pressure of his hand, must have been his teacher. And here was the tragedy of his penury—and God only knows what temptations came to him to surrender his ideals and to set before himself money, rather than truth or art, as the object of his work. He could not hope to marry with his small pittance. He was only twenty-seven, it is true—but there was no prospect of money in his high calling. And after three years of an inspiring engagement, all cor-

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respondence between the two was suspended. The penniless poet could not marry. Twenty years from the first vision of the Oread or the Dryad, and fourteen years from that early betrothal, had to pass, before these loyal hearts were united. That constancy in frustrated love, combined with the constancy in the pursuit of his art, must be counted among the invaluable services which the poet rendered to his age and to mankind.

But though we are not permitted even to glance at the sacred intimacy of that loyal devotion, there are some extracts from the letters of those first three years which suggest what the engagement meant to this large-hearted, but essentially reserved, man. In these fragments, more than anywhere else, his inner life is laid bare, and by these revelations we are able to judge how much in the poems is really the reflection of himself. "I dare not tell how high I rate humour, which is generally most fruitful in the highest and most solemn human spirits. Dante is full of it, Shakespeare, Cervantes, and almost all the greatest have been pregnant with this glorious power. You will find it even in the Gospel of Christ." The dialect-poems, *the Northern Farmer, Old Style* and *New Style*, and the *Northern Cobbler*, are the best illustration of this remark. Again, it is to Emily Sellwood he tells that beautiful experience at his beloved Mablethorpe: "I am housed at Mr Wild-



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man's, an old friend of mine in these parts : he and his wife are two perfectly honest Methodists. When I came, I asked her after news, and she replied : 'Why, Mr Tennyson, there's only one piece of news that I know, that Christ died for all men.' And I said to her : 'That is old news, and good news, and new news' ; wherewith the good woman seemed satisfied. I was half-yesterday reading anecdotes of Methodist ministers, and liking to read them too, and of the teaching of Christ, that purest light of God." To her he shows his deepest faith and his highest view of life : "Why has God made one to suffer more than another? Why is it not meted equally to all? Let us be silent, for we know nothing of these things, and we trust there is One who knows all. God cannot be cruel. If He were, the heart could only find relief in the wildest blasphemies, which would cease to be blasphemies. God must be all powerful, else the soul could never deem Him worthy of her highest worship. Let us leave it therefore to God as to the wisest. Who knows whether revelation be not itself a veil to hide the glory of that Love, which we could not look upon without marring our sight and our onward progress? If it were proclaimed as a truth 'No man shall perish ; all shall live, after a certain time shall have gone by, in bliss with God' ; such a truth might tell well with one or two lofty spirits, but would be the hindrance of the world." Thus the

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truths which took form in the great poems were beaten out in the heart to heart intercourse with his future wife. "There is the glory of being loved," he says to her, "for so have we laid great bases for Eternity." "All life is a school, a preparation, a purpose: nor can we pass current in a higher college if we do not undergo the tedium of education in this lower one." "Through darkness and storm and weariness of mind and of body is there built a passage for His created ones to the gates of light." "That made me count the less of the sorrows when I caught a glimpse of the sorrowless Eternity." "We must bear or we must die. It is easier perhaps to die, but infinitely less noble. The immortality of man disdains and rejects the thought, the immortality of man to which the cycles and æons are as hours and as days." "What matters it how much man knows and does if he keep not a reverential look upward? He is only the subtlest beast in the field." "The stern daughter of the voice of God—Duty—unclothed with the warmth of the feelings is as impotent to convert as the old Stoicism." "A good woman is a wondrous creature, cleaving to the right and the good in all change; lovely in her youthful comeliness, lovely all her life long in comeliness of heart."

This is the inmost soul of the man. One more of these fragments expresses a constant and strengthen

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ing habit of his mind: "Bitterness of any sort becomes not the sons of Adam, still less pride, for they are in that talk of theirs for the most part but as children babbling in the market-place."

Nothing upset him more than depreciatory talk of other people. His own judgments were lenient, his appreciation of the work of others was unfailingly generous. He always respected human nature, even in the poorest and the least esteemed. His severest critics, though they could wound, could not excite him to retaliation. There was a noble humility in him, such a humility as is only born of the diligent effort at self-amendment.

His marriage was for years postponed; but he set himself to the care of the mother, who, in the absence of the elder brothers, Frederick and Charles, looked to him to manage her affairs and to make her home. In 1837 came that final departure from Somersby, which is commemorated in stanzas ci-ciii. of *In Memoriam*:

We leave the well-beloved place  
Where first we gazed upon the sky;  
The roofs, that heard our earliest cry,  
Shall shelter one of stranger race.

At first the family moved to High Beech in Epping Forest; and it would seem that the roots was struck there almost as firmly as at Somersby. For when the doctors ordered them to Tunbridge Wells after a stay

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of three years, there was "such a scene of sobbing and weeping among the servants at Beech Hill, and cottagers' daughters, as that Cockney residence has seldom witnessed, perhaps never since its stones were cemented and trowelled. There were poor Milnes wringing her hands and howling, Ann Green swallowing her own tears with exclamations of such pathos as would have moved the heart of a whinstone, and other villagers all joining in the chorus, as if for some great public calamity. Finding we had human hearts, though we lived in a big house, they thought it all the harder that they were to lose us so soon." *Finding we had human hearts*; that brings us near to the secret of Tennyson's power. The largeness of his physical proportions, no less than the largeness of his poetical gifts, was the theme of universal admiration among the people whom he now constantly met in London. Maclise the painter fell quite in love with him, says an unpublished letter, as the seeker after the beautiful well might. But it was the largeness of the human sympathy which really made his distinction among men. The never-to-be-forgotten love of his lost friend made him at this time, says Jowett, prefer Shakespeare's sonnets to the dramas. If there was a certain brusqueness of manner, 'grumpiness' his friends called it, it covered a singular sweetness of temper. Let one example suffice. Monckton Milnes wrote to ask him

for a contribution to a poetical album which Lord Northampton was getting up for the family of a man of letters: he jestingly declined, saying that he had been deluded into writing for some lady because she was beautiful, but had sworn to do no such thing again: "Whether the marquis be beautiful or not I don't much mind; if he be, let him give God thanks and make no boast. To write for people with prefixes to their names is to milk he-goats; there is neither honour nor profit." Strange to say, Milnes took offence at this refusal. Tennyson was at once generously and humorously contrite: "that you should have taken pet at my unhappy badinage made me lay down my pipe and stare at the fire for ten minutes." To make amends he promised a contribution to the publication, and offered to get one from his brother Charles, and perhaps one from his brother Frederick. Large, generous, patient, a man with a human heart.

No episode of this period brings out his character more distinctly than his intercourse with Wordsworth. The older poet excused himself at first from admiration of the younger, by saying that he was too settled in his ideas to receive new forms of beauty; but his attention was riveted by *You ask me why, though ill at ease*, and *Of old sat Freedom on the heights*. "I must acknowledge," he said, "that these two poems are very solid and noble in thought.

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Their diction also seems singularly stately." But the young poet paid a call of reverence to the older when he was staying in Hampstead. And meeting him later at the house of Moxon, the publisher, he was restless and weary until he found an opportunity of confessing in a few simple and touching words his debt to the laureate of English poetry. The old poet recorded the incident in a letter. "I saw Tennyson when I was in London several times. He is decidedly the first of our living poets, and I hope will live to give the world still better things. You will be pleased to hear that he expressed in the strongest terms his gratitude to my writings. To this I was far from indifferent." It may be that at the bar of the centuries Tennyson's place as a poet will ultimately be far beneath Wordsworth's; for in spite of the admiration of contemporaries the younger poet never touched those heights which the older reaches at his highest: but as a man Tennyson may stand by Wordsworth, and his character is in two respects even nobler, he was entirely free from egotism and vanity, and his mind did not stiffen, but grew even more elastic, with years.

Admiration for the great writer constantly passes into fresh admiration of the man; the man with "that perfect transparency of mind, like the clearness of air in the finest climates, when it is nearness

not distance that lends enchantment to the view; the man who respected human nature wherever he found it free from unworthiness." There was a depth of sympathy in him which came out once when a witty friend in that brilliant circle made, in reference to the subject of indigestion, a jocular remark about "the disturbed districts"; but the "disturbed districts" were places where, in those sad Chartist days, before Free Trade, homes were destitute and human hearts were desperate. Tennyson loved joking with the best; but suddenly he was serious, and with his deep and wonderful voice said: "I can't joke about so grave a question." He was at this time constantly talking about reform, and longing to bring in what he called *The Golden Year*. With extraordinary insight he saw that the Chartist agitation must be met not by repression, but by National Education, by a patriotic press, by Free Trade, and by the sympathy and co-operation of the Christian churches. "Finding we had human hearts;" that is the key to all.

• In 1841 the family were at Tunbridge Wells. But after a few months they moved to Boxley, near Maidstone, to be within reach of Park House, where his sister Cecilia, who had married Edmund Lushington, lived. Who wills may know the Park, for it is the enchanting scene of *The Princess*. It was at a festival of the Maidstone Mechanics' Institute on

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July 6th, 1842, that the poet obtained the requisite occasion for his piece. This, therefore, is classic ground; for Tennyson stands almost alone among poets in his power to invest the residence of an English country gentleman with the glamour which it is easier to imagine either in a cottage or in a wilderness. There was, however, a remarkable company at that country house. Of 'society' in the technical sense of the word the poet then and always fought shy. But at Park House frequently assembled the men who were the most progressive thinkers of the day, men who, much to the astonishment of the present Dean Bradley — then an Oxford undergraduate, and a fortunate visitor there—were able to discuss great themes of life and religion without mentioning J. H. Newman and the Tractarian controversy. Many of these were members of the Sterling Club which in London took the place of the Apostles at Cambridge, and included the old and courtly poet Rogers (certain of his immortality!), Proctor, Thackeray, Dickens, Forster, Savage Landor, Leigh Hunt, Campbell, and happily for us the master-painter of human character Thomas Carlyle. Fortunately indeed, for Carlyle drew a picture, two pictures, with all Rembrandt's power, of the Alfred Tennyson just at the end of these ten years of trial. "A fine, large-featured, dim-eyed, bronze-coloured, shaggy-headed man is Alfred; dusty, smoky, free and



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easy; who swims, outwardly and inwardly, with great composure in an articulate element as of tranquil chaos and tobacco smoke; great now and then when he does emerge; a most restful brotherly solid-hearted man." Carlyle's distaste for poets and their productions relieves this sketch from all charge of partiality. And the full length portrait is equally candid and trustworthy. "Alfred is one of the few British and foreign figures" writes Carlyle to Emerson, "(a not increasing number I think) who are and remain beautiful to me, a true human soul, or some authentic approximation thereto, to whom your own soul can say 'Brother.' However, I doubt he will not come to see me; he often skips me in these brief visits to town; skips everybody, indeed; being a man solitary and sad, as certain men are, dwelling in an element of gloom, carrying a bit of chaos about him, in short, which he is manufacturing into Cosmos. . . . He preferred to live unpromoted and to write poems. In this way he lives still, now here, now there: the family always within reach of London, never in it; he himself making rare and brief visits, lodging in some old comrade's rooms. I think he must be under forty, not much under it. One of the finest-looking men in the world. A great shock of rough dusky dark hair; bright laughing hazel eyes; massive aquiline face, most massive yet most delicate; of sallow brown complexion, almost Indian looking,

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clothes cynically loose, free and easy, smokes infinite tobacco.<sup>1</sup> His voice is musical, metallic, fit for loud laughter and piercing wail, and all that may lie between ; speech and speculation free and plenteous. I do not meet in these decades such company over a pipe. We shall see what he will grow to."

A man to whom your own soul can say 'Brother,' that is the salient feature of this admirable portrait. "Carrying a bit of chaos about him" is the shadow. They were dark days, for all his heroic and successful effort to manufacture his Chaos into Cosmos. He had compelling cause to grieve. And before the light dawned, the last touch was given to the gloom. In 1844 came a crash. He had invested his patrimony in a wood-carving scheme promoted by Dr Allen, a 'speculative, hopeful, earnest, frothy' man, as Carlyle called him. The business failed and all the money was lost. He fell into a hypochondria which threatened his life, and went to Cheltenham to be treated with hydropathy. But the great nature could bear no malice to the man who had duped him and reduced him to penury—"I never met a heart so large and full of love," writes one of his friends at this time—Dr Allen died suddenly and Fitzgerald asks him if he had heard. "I *had* heard the news," is the reply. "No gladness crossed my heart, but

<sup>1</sup> There lies the joke of his delicious refusal to visit his Cambridge friends because they were smoke-sotted !

sorrow and pity : that's not theatrical but the truth ; wherefore bear with me, though perhaps it may seem a little out of the tide of things."

But in this densest gloom the light had really dawned, though he scarcely realised it. For these ten years he had been so completely in the shade that a favourable review published in far-off Calcutta, or a chance reference to him in a French paper as "jeune enthousiaste de l'école gracieuse de Thomas Moore," would warm his heart and send him to work with new hope. Friends of course never wavered. Wordsworth, always grudging in praise, freely ranked him first among the living poets. But it is almost impossible for us to realise how restricted was the recognition and how persistent was the general depreciation. Even in 1847, seventeen years after his first book a distinguished reviewer in a leading Quarterly, referring to the Author of *The Princess* as "a great poet," found his proof revised for him by the editor into "a true poet." The splendour of his subsequent fame disguises from us the still greater glory of those lonely, brave, unrecognised years. Is there even one other example of a poet, certain of his vocation and true to it, holding himself in this long restraint, toiling to improve his work, shunning praise, enduring blame, until he could give to the world something which would pass his own rigorous censorship? If success had not awaited him, this patient self-discipline would

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still have been a mark of greatness. Those ten years carry their appropriate lesson even when we put our hand over the issue. But success came, and the reward was great.

The poems of 1842 were in two volumes ; the first contained the old poems improved and polished to the point almost of transformation, the second contained a number of new compositions, and especially the English Idyls, a varied group of scenes from our home and country life, which were original in form and in conception.

The recognition of this new effort was immediate. Sterling just lived to write a favourable review. "On my return to Oxford in October 1842," says Dean Bradley, "his name was on everyone's lips, his poems discussed, criticised, interpreted ; portions of them repeatedly set for translation into Latin or Greek verse. . . . The intense interest called out by the two volumes seems to me, on looking back, to have taken my young contemporaries at Oxford as well as the outside world of readers as it were by storm." Rogers wrote, "every day have I resolved to write and tell you with what delight I have read and read again your two beautiful volumes ; but it was my wish to tell you so *face to face*. That wish however remains unfulfilled and write I must, for very few things, if any, have ever thrilled me so much." Charles Dickens sent a copy

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of his works and said: "For the love I bear you as a man whose writings enlist my whole heart and nature in admiration of their Truth and Beauty, set these books upon your shelves, believing that you have no more earnest and sincere homage than mine." But the most wonderful acknowledgment was from the most discerning, and from the confirmed disparager of poetry. "If you knew," wrote Carlyle, "what my relation has been to the thing called English 'Poetry' for many years back, you would think the reading and re-reading of the poems surprising. Truly it is long since in any English book, poetry or prose, I have felt the pulse of a real man's heart as I do in this same. A right valiant, true fighting, victorious heart; strong as a lion's, yet gentle, loving, and full of music; what I call a singer's heart! There are tones as of the nightingale; low murmurs as of wood-doves at summer noon; every where a noble sound as of the free winds and leafy woods. The sunniest glow of life dwells in that soul, chequered duly with dark streaks from night and Hades; everywhere one feels as if all were filled with yellow glowing sunlight, some glorious golden vapour, from which form after form actually bodies itself; naturally golden forms. In one word, there seems to be a note of 'The Eternal Melodies' in this man, for which let other men be thankful and joyful! Your 'Dora,' reminds me of

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the book of Ruth; in the 'Two Voices' which I am told some reviewer calls 'trivial morality,' I think of passages in Job. . . . In the 'Vision of Sin' I am reminded of my friend Jean Paul. This is not babble, it is speech, true deposition of a volunteer witness. And so I say let us all rejoice somewhat. And so let us all smite rhythmically, all in concert, 'the sounding furrows:' and sail forward with new cheer, 'beyond the sunset,' whither we are bound—

It may be that the gulfs will wash us down,  
It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,  
And see the great Achilles whom we knew.

These lines do not make me weep, but there is in me what would fill whole lachrymatories as I read. But do you, when you return to London, come down to me, and let us smoke a pipe together. With few words, with many, or with none, it need not be an uneloquent pipe!" This was indeed *laudari a laudato*. That enthusiasm of the first man of letters of the day carried with it the enthusiasm of the country. And with his curious felicity, Carlyle in his quotation hit not only the finest, but also the most characteristic and personal, poem in the volumes, the *Ulysses*. For this poem, written soon after Arthur Hallam's death, expressed the poet's own brave resolution to go forward, undaunted by the grim shadows of life and the terrors of death:

Though much is taken, much abides ; and though  
We are not now that strength which in old days  
Moved earth and heaven ; that which we are, we are ;  
One equal temper of heroic minds,  
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will  
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

While this was the self-portraiture of the deeper kind, there was also in this volume a lighter sketch of himself in the society of that time. *The Epic* is a prelude to the English Idyls ; and it introduces that *Morte D'Arthur* which already foreshadowed the great poem of later years. And this poem sets one in modern society, to read the old tale in the light of the present, since "a truth looks freshest in the fashion of to-day." And there you see the poet, as he was already known among the favoured friends, and came to be better known when the circle widened, reading in that deep and thrilling voice his own poems :

And the poet little urged  
But with some prelude of disparagement,  
Read, mouthing out his hollow oes and aes,  
Deep-chested music—

The new poems were not only statelier in their form they were also richer and fuller in their meaning. Evidently here was above all a teacher with a message. By deliberate toil and effort, it was high art ; but by an almost unconscious instinct, and as the outcome of his own strenuous life, it was also lofty

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teaching. *The Palace of Art*, *Saint Simon Stylites*, *The Two Voices* and *The Vision of Sin*, body forth a whole theory of religion and of life. They might justify Matthew Arnold's definition of poetry as "criticism of life"; they might justify the earliest conception of the Sacred Bard, as a prophet uttering inspired truth.

The 'artistry' was by now so consummate that no one felt it to be didactic. The believer in art for art's sake would read with exquisite delight *The Palace of Art*, though its argument was to show how vainly the soul seeks enjoyment in art alone, while it forgets its right relation to man and to God. Even an ascetic might read and love *Saint Simon Stylites* for its beauty, though the lesson was to show the grotesque perversion of Christianity implied in that inhuman self-mortification. The brooding soul that courts death might be saved from suicide by the music of *The Two Voices*, almost without noticing that it is a lofty reasoning towards a wholesome state of mind.<sup>1</sup> And *The Vision of Sin*, depicting the end, here and hereafter, of the sensual life, might win by its versification the most degraded to better things. This was assuredly a new kind of teaching. The world has agreed to regard homiletics as dull, and speaking broadly they who stand most in need of sermons are

<sup>1</sup> One instance is on record of an intended suicide being thus saved.



the least likely to read them. But here was preaching in the garb of a fascinating art. It is said that all the Tennyson boys were designed for the Church. Only Charles took orders, and Leigh Hunt in his sarcastic vein noted that Charles in his poetry "has a graceful luxury, but combining less of the spiritual with it, which, I suppose, is the reason why he has become a clergyman!" Our poet was not an ordained clergyman, but he was taking his place as the religious teacher of the nineteenth century who was to utter his voice where no preacher is heard. It was in effect what he called the "old news, and good news, and new news," which in his manner he was to give to his age, with this signal advantage over the preacher, that he might be sure that all the cultivated minds of his time would read him, and even the common people would hear him gladly.

Thus success had come; but what it had cost, may be judged from a passing remark to his friend Rawnsley in 1845: "I begin to feel an old man myself." Strictly speaking he was never to grow old; he was to be an almost unexampled instance of a poet retaining to the age of eighty-three the freshness and fire, and some of the magical use of words, which distinguished him in youth. But the result of those long years of toil, and sorrow, and disappointment and loss, of hope deferred and of genius unrecognised, was that already at thirty-six he began to feel old.

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Success had come, and the recognition of it in the highest quarters immediately followed. Carlyle had set his mind on his poet receiving a pension, and he took Monckton Milnes to task for not securing it. The statesman excused himself, saying that his constituents might think it a job, as none of them would know who Tennyson was. "Richard Milnes," was Carlyle's delightful rejoinder, "on the day of judgment, when the Lord asks you why you didn't get that pension for Alfred Tennyson, it will not do to lay the blame on your constituents; it is *you* that will be damned."

Under this portentous threat Houghton approached the Prime Minister, who had not, it seemed, read a line of the poet's. The two names proposed for a pension were Tennyson and Sheridan Knowles. Sir Robert Peel was impartial, as he knew nothing of either. But Houghton read to him *Ulysses*, with the result that the pension £200 a year was conferred on the author, and the news was announced by the Premier's own hand: "I rejoice that you have enabled me to fulfil the intentions of Parliament by advising the Crown to confer a mark of Royal Favour on one who has devoted to worthy purposes great intellectual powers."

Thus the recognition of the nation was complete. The loyal friends were justified. First the high authorities in literature, then the young manhood

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of the day, and finally the Queen's Government recognised the kind of man whom they had among them. He is rewarded not for mere poetic gift, but because "he has devoted to worthy purposes great intellectual powers."

Tennyson was shy and reluctant to receive the money, but he was deeply gratified by the way in which it had been offered. "I wish the causelessly bitter against me and mine," he wrote to a friend, "no worse punishment than that they could read the very flattering letter Peel wrote me; let us leave them in their limbo,

*Non ragionam di lor, ma guarda e passa."*

This was Dante's dignity, but there is more than Dante's sweetness. The long and trying discipline had left no bitterness in that "heart large and full of love." We have henceforth to watch a strong man in the full blaze of popular recognition and applause, retaining his perfect simplicity and humility, following his high vocation, undiverted by success as he had been undaunted by apparent failure. But it is in those valleys of the shadow that the hearts of men are tried; they who can bear themselves manfully, and keep their course when the light has retreated and the landskip is darkened, are the brother-spirits that help and encourage men in their upward march. The life

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of unbroken prosperity could hardly be regarded as a saintly life; untried, it might or it might not be; tried and not found wanting, in the hour of gloom, it can deliver its full message in the high places and the radiance of prosperity.

Chapter IV  
In Memoriam, 1846-1852

“Then to the melody  
Over a wilderness  
Gliding, and glancing at  
Elf of the woodland,  
Gnome of the cavern,  
Griffin and Giant,  
And dancing of Fairies,  
In desolate hollows,  
And wraiths of the mountain,  
And rolling of dragons  
By warble of water,  
Or cataract music  
Of falling torrents,  
Flitted the Gleam.”

“It is curious to note the sudden change in the tone of the criticisms,” wrote Mrs Ritchie, “the absolute surrender of these knights of the pen to the irresistible and brilliant advance of the unknown and visored warrior. The visor is raised, now the face is familiar to us all, and the arms, though tested in a hundred fights, are shining and unconquered still.” Criticism was not, as we shall see, silenced ; with each new volume there were found some who bitterly condemned, and many to observe that it

was a falling off from its predecessors ; and naturally the most original and the most beautiful poems were received with the most suspicion by the conventional judgment of the day. But practically the leap into fame was made, and the position of Tennyson, as the greatest of the English poets of his time, was not seriously contested from now to the end of his long life.

How did he bear himself in this blaze of popularity, in the honours and the wealth and the happiness which flowed in upon him? So far as we can observe him, his head was never for a moment turned ; no thought of pride, no word of boasting, no depreciation of others, marred his triumph. This visored knight was courageous in the hour of apparent defeat ; but he was perfectly calm and unelated when favours rained down upon him from every side.

He had loved solitude, broken only by the converse of friends, and shunned society ; he was the same still, when the doors of every society were open to him, and every one desired nothing better than to fête him. He was proof against the seductions of society, says Mr Aubrey de Vere, "through the absence of vanity, even more than through shyness, indolence, or any other peculiarity. He was born a poet, and had no ambition except the single one of first meriting and then receiving the poet's crown, an

ambition the unselfish character of which is asserted by Shelley in the expression, Fame is Love disguised."

He was "be-dined usque ad nauseam"—and he conceived a genuine dislike for the "snobbery of English society." By 1852 he writes to Monckton Milnes: "I have given up dining out and am about to retire into utter solitude in some country house; but if you feel aggrieved at sending one invitation after another to me, unaccepted, I will come." As Ruskin said of the great artist, "he should be fit to move in the best society, *and should keep out of it.*" It is the renunciation which a poet must make, especially in the hour of his popularity. And if we admire Tennyson because he was fit for the most exalted society of his time and might always have entered it, we must admire him still more that he remained unsexed, apparently even unattracted, by it.<sup>1</sup> After all, it is the wilderness that blossoms as the rose.

In 1846 the family moved to Bellevue House, St James' Square, Cheltenham. And though Tennyson was very much away, this was still his home. And it was through living there that he became acquainted

<sup>1</sup> At a far later date when literary breakfast parties were the fashion, the Duchess of Argyll cautiously sounded him, whether he would not like to be one of a party—and she mentioned the distinguished men that were coming. "Duchess," was the brief reply, "I should hate it."

with F. W. Robertson, whose sermons have exercised in this century an influence not dissimilar to that of Tennyson's poetry. Intrinsically he found here a brother in arms. His religious position was becoming defined; and it could not be better described than by saying that in his own independent way he was a follower of Robertson. In August of that year he took a tour in Switzerland with Moxon the publisher. We read of nervous and sleepless nights, but we get two characteristic touches in this tour: "At Weggis, landlady takes me out to select live fish for dinner. I am too tender-hearted, so we go without fish." And the crags of the Bernese Oberland—as distinct from the high summits—so satisfied the poet's sense of beauty that "I *laughed* by myself." The child-heart within him was strengthened, and not marred, by the coming of success.

On his return he received some Somersby violets from the daughter of the patron of the old living, and his heart overflowed: "Nothing could be sweeter than Cathy's Somersby violets, and doubt not but that I shall keep them as a sacred treasure. The violets of one's native place gathered by the hands of a pure innocent child must needs be precious to me, and indeed I would have acknowledged the receipt of them and sent her a thousand loves and kisses before now, but there were several reasons why" I did not write . . . only I pray you kiss her



for me very sweetly on lip and cheek and forehead, and assure her of my gratitude. I love all children, but I loved little Cathy par excellence by a kind of instinct when I saw her first." This from one who was being "fêted and dined every day." No wonder the parents of the "dear little violet girl" wished him to be the godfather of their boy. He consented: "Call your child Alfred if you will: he was born in the same house, perhaps the same chamber, as myself, and I trust he is destined to a far happier life than mine has been, poor little fellow! Give him a kiss for his godfather, and one to Cathy for her violets which I received and cherished, or if one do not seem enough, give them by the dozen." Later on he was, with Count D'Orsay, godfather to one of Charles Dickens' children. His mind was at this time eagerly set on the new birth of time; the golden year seemed not too far away; he welcomed everything which heralded "a grander and more liberal state of opinion, and consequently sweeter and nobler modes of living." It is by becoming as a little child that one enters the kingdom.

And in these days of dawning prosperity we come across the first instance of that abounding charity to literary men, deserving and in difficulties, which became a characteristic through life. "I got your parcel," he writes to Moxon, "and bluebell this morning, and a letter from a man who seems

deserving and in difficulties ; he has asked me to lend him four pounds, which I have promised to give him, and referred him to you." The sympathy with the poor, notwithstanding his shyness, and the apparent remoteness of his life from them, was a constant undercurrent in his thought. "I wish they would be a little kinder to the poor," he writes in speaking of the country gentlemen, for whom he had a general admiration. "Smoked with workmen," is an entry in his Cornish diary. In his Irish tour "he was shocked at the poverty of the peasantry, and the marks of havoc wrought through the country by the great potato famine." He loved to read Crabbe aloud ; once after finishing *A Sorrowful Tale* he looked round and said reproachfully, "I do not see that any of you are weeping." And taking into account his temperament and his surroundings, we cannot but be deeply impressed to find that among all the tributes which poured in upon him he valued most the admiration of Samuel Bamford, a Lancashire weaver. "I reckon his admiration as the highest honour I have yet received." At Mrs Gaskell's request—she knew Bamford well—Tennyson sent to his humble admirer the two volumes which were above the range of his purse. And certainly the greatest author might be proud to receive from a working man such a letter as this : "Your poems I cannot forget them. I cannot put

them away from my thoughts ; the persons and the scenes they represent haunt me. I have read them all over and over, and I have not awakened once this night without

‘Thy heart, my life, my love, my bride’

immediately recurring to my thoughts.

“Oh ! your *Oriana* has started the tears into my eyes and into those of my dear wife, many a time. It is a deep thing. Your *Locksley Hall* is terribly beautiful ; profoundly impressive. The departure of your *Sleeping Palace* is almost my favourite, and your *Gardener’s Daughter*, ah ! it brings early scenes to my mind.

‘The story of my early love that haunts me now I’m old,  
And broods within my very heart, although it’s well-nigh cold.’

“My wife, bless her ! I never feel my sensibilities gushing over, but when I look I find hers doing the same. And it has frequently been the case since I was so fortunate as to have your poems. But your English ! why, it is almost unlimitedly expressive. This language of ours, what can it not be made to say ? What height, what depth, filled with all glorious hues, terrible glooms, and vivid flashes does it not combine, and your poems exhibit all ? Are you well ? Are you happy ? I hope you are both.”

It is only a writer whose heart beats very true to man, to nature and to God, that can elicit such

feeling from the inarticulate hearts of the workmen. But underneath that unexampled polish of the cultured man there was the childlike love that brings all men together. He sallied out into the future; he dreamed of the better days, and meanwhile with great practical wisdom used often to declare that the two great social questions of the time were "the housing and education of the poor man before making him our master, and the higher education of women." If he had not been born a poet he would have been a great social reformer; being born a poet, catching the ear and winning the heart of his time, he has been one of the influences which have made us all social reformers.

In this universal charity there was only one exception, and for that he expressed afterwards sincere regret. Sir Edward Lytton Bulwer attacked Peel for putting Tennyson on the Pension List. For once and once only the poet was angry, and wrote "The New Timon and the Poets" with "An Afterthought," which John Forster unhappily sent to *Punch*. In looking back on that solitary episode, Tennyson said: "Wretched work. Odium literarium. They were too bitter; I do not think that I should ever have published them."

But it was a solitary instance: never before or after did he write a line against anyone.

From this time his letters are few; he found that

all his strength was required for his work. He appeared perhaps a little neglectful of his friends, and even did not see the beloved mother as often as she would have wished. But they all seem to have understood. And as he said to Rawnsley, "I love my old friends as much as ever; recent friendships may be broken through, but old ones early made are a part of one's blood and bones. I say my old friendships are as dear as ever, but that you must accept this protestation in lieu of my personal presence, and not be hard of faith but believing. As for the mother, her picture is drawn in the Prince's mother of *The Princess*.

Happy he  
With such a mother! Faith in womankind  
Beats with his blood, and trust in all things high  
Comes easy to him, and though he trip and fall  
He shall not blind his soul with clay.

And he was full of penitence if, in the multitude of thoughts he seemed to forget. "Mother was delighted beyond measure to see me, making me remorseful that I had not been here before."

In 1847 appeared a poem which had been talked over with Emily Sellwood, that cherished companion of the spirit, who, surrendered for those long anxious years, but never removed from his heart, was now the inspiration of this new venture. *The Princess*, was his mode, fantastic in form, but deeply serious in purpose, of approaching the Woman question, which

he felt to be one of the two pressing problems of social reform. The tale of the princess, who resolves to achieve the education of woman in stern separation from men, threw a glamour over the half derided thought of women being educated to take their place side by side with men. Girton and Newnham and Somerville Hall are the realisation of the poet's dream. But the intrusion of the human love which brought Ida to her noble surrender is the assertion of the truth that woman cannot be educated in isolation from man. Tennyson deeply believed that to recognise the essential difference, the interdependence and the mutual supplements of the sexes, was the first condition of effecting that improvement in the position of women which he desired. As a brochure on social reform the poem did its work, and for that reason perhaps, it has a little fallen into the background. In spite of its fanciful and humorous setting this was a sermon, to be heard at the time and then to be forgotten.

It is curious to see how the poem struck the public of the day. Hort, at that time an undergraduate at Cambridge, is reading it. "It seems good," he says, "though absurd," but he adds in a later letter, "I like its absurdity. It is not a high flight, but it is a glorious poem for all that. . . . I will give you one exquisite line as a sample of its delicacy and beauty :

“Upon the sword  
She tapt her tiny silken-sandalled foot.”<sup>1</sup>

But a year later: “I have just read through *The Princess* again with the utmost delight; I do not know whether its wisdom or its beauty predominates. . . . I utterly and entirely recant the slanders I formerly uttered against its purity; *The Saint's Tragedy* has taught me truer ideas.”<sup>2</sup>

Yes, its wisdom for the time was equal to its beauty. Hamilton, the great mathematician was right: “It deeply presses on my reflection how much wiser a book is Tennyson's *Princess* than my *Quaternions*.” The beauty is overwhelming, although Fitzgerald professed to give up all hopes of his friend after the *Princess*, adding however, “Alfred is the same magnanimous, kindly, delightful fellow as ever, uttering by far the finest prose sayings of anyone.” And the poet himself considered the beautiful passage “Come down, O maid, from yonder mountain height,” written at Lauterbrunnen and Grindelwald, amongst his “most successful work.”

The songs, which were added in 1850, especially the echoes of Killarney in *Blow, Bugle, Blow*, and the final form of *Sweet and Low*, which was Emily Sellwood's choice, not only give an interpretation to the whole drama, but remain among the most exquisite music that has ever been produced in English.

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, i. 63.

<sup>2</sup> *Ib.* p. 84, 85.

But it was not the beauty which constituted the real success of *The Princess*, it was the wisdom. And those who hailed it with the greatest delight were men like Aubrey de Vere, Charles Kingsley, Frederick Robertson, who were profoundly interested in the spiritual progress of the age. Few things are more touching, and more characteristic than the first meeting between the poet and Frederick Robertson. Tennyson felt that something notable was expected from him, and those large earnest eyes, full of admiration were bent on searching the mystery of the heart: "So, for the life of me, from pure nervousness, I could talk of nothing but beer!" This was by no means the only time that from nervousness, or brusqueness, or sheer contempt of conventionalities, he gave to strangers an unfavourable and even ludicrously untrue impression of himself.

In May 1848, the year in which the thrones of Europe were shaken by revolution, and Emily Tennyson was actually immured in Paris while the streets were barricaded and the King was a fugitive, Tennyson made a visit to Cornwall, in the course of which the legends of Arthur which had always fascinated him began to take more definite shape. This year may be regarded as the birth-year of the *Idylls of the King*, that golden and musical story of the moral foundations of the Throne. What actually took him to Bude was a twofold desire: "I hear that there are



larger waves there than on any other part of the British coast; and must go thither to be alone with God." His introduction to the place was tragedy-comedy. Arriving at Bude in the dark on May 30th, he asked the girl the way to the sea. She opened a back door; he went out and stumbled down, six feet sheer, on fanged cobbles. His injuries introduced him to the local doctor, and to the country people who all knew about him and had read his poems. One miner modestly hid behind a wall to get a good look at him. The notes of this tour, in which his object was to see the great waves and to be alone with God, are very brief, but full of suggestion. For instance on June 6th, "Went to Land's End by Logan rock, leaden-backed mewes wailing on cliff, one with two young ones. Mist. Great yellow flare just before sunset. Funeral. Land's End and Life's end." In such form the pageant of the world presents itself to one who is alone with God, beautiful, mystical, symbolic, the passing shadows pregnant with eternal realities. He sought and found King Arthur's stone, and evidently his life unrolled before him under the magical imagery of the Coming and the Passing of Arthur.

Mrs Charles, the sweet and gracious author of the *Schönberg-Cotta Family*, was then a girl, and she has left some lifelike impressions of the poet at this time. He had met with a congenial soul and he was able, as most people were to her latest days, to

open out to her. "A powerful, thoughtful face, kind smile, hearty laugh, extremely near-sighted," she says. Westley the optician said that he and Sir Charles Napier were the most short-sighted men in England. He often feared that he would lose his sight altogether; and there is something miraculous in the minute observations made by those very inefficient eyes. He talked of art, says Mrs Charles, and geology and books. But his special interest was "in the Italian movement as in all great movements for freedom." He was very outspoken and amusing. For instance he touched off a clergyman's wife, who was now Low Church, now High, "always equally vehement, little brains, much conscientiousness; husband preached one thing in the church, she another in the parish." He could not do with Miss Martineau, for we were not, he supposed, Unitarian or Pagan. He criticised Carlyle as too vehement and destructive. And perhaps most interesting of all, he said "some parts of the *Book of Revelation* are finer in English than in Greek, e.g. 'And again they said Alleluia, and their smoke went up for ever and ever' — magnificent conception, darkness and fire rolling together for ever and ever." He was always a great Bible reader, and like his great contemporary Ruskin, he owes much of his power as a writer to his knowledge of the Authorised Version. And now along with the Cornish coast, and the legends of

the place, it was that magnificent and mysterious vision of John the Divine, that was shaping and inspiring the longest and most sustained of his messages to the world, the *Idylls of the King*.

This same year he paid a visit to Scotland. And he says: "On the whole perhaps I enjoyed no day more than the one I spent at Kirk Alloway by the monument of poor Burns, and the orchards and banks and braes of bonny Doon. I made a pilgrimage thither out of love for the great peasant; they were gathering in the wheat and the spirit of the man mingled or seemed to mingle with all I saw. I know you do not care much for him," he is writing to Aubrey de Vere, "but I do, and hold that there never was immortal poet if he be not one." Shortly after, Aubrey de Vere persuaded him to spend five weeks with his family at Curragh Chase, with the assurance that the waves on the Irish coast were higher than at Bude. One night there was a dance, which he denounced as a stupid thing; but a lady in the company took him to task, and drew him into the circle. "He was the gayest of the gay for several hours, turning out moreover an excellent dancer." But if gaiety was a passing mood, there was always a deep seriousness and purpose in him, which could not be long repressed. A young lady sitting next him at dinner spoke of a marriage as a *penniless* one. He drew a penny from his pocket, slapped it down

near her plate, and said, "There, I give you that, for that is the God you worship." She was frightened, but also amused. They were soon good friends; and he promised to send, and did send, to her a pocket copy of Milton. In the succession of Spencer, Milton, Wordsworth, he was, morally at least, worthy to stand. Not the least charming of the episodes in this visit to Ireland was a talk with a quarryman, which resulted forty-three years after in the following letter: "Long life to your honour, as Irish peasants used to say, and so say I, the man who was working the slate quarry on the Island of Valencia, when you spent a few days there in 1848, Chartist times in London and Fenian times in Ireland. I remember you telling us, not without some glee, how a Valencian fenian stealthily dogged your footsteps up the mountain and coming at last close to your ear, whispered, Be you from France. . . . With the troops of friends this day wishing you long life, heartily joins the ci-devant quarryman and Yours truly, Bewicke Blackburne (now also Octogenarian)."

At this time his mind was full of what he called *Fragments of an Elegy*, the coming *In Memoriam*. Aubrey de Vere mentions that he would read or rather intone them every evening, while the tears coursed down his face. For sixteen years those "swallow flights of song which dipped their wings in tears and skimmed away" had been haunting his

mind. If time had laid a healing hand upon the bruised heart, it had not lessened the loss, or altered the passionate love for one who was, as he solemnly declared, "as perfect as a human being could be."

At last, in May 1850, the results of these long years of brooding were printed, at first for a few friends, and then anonymously for the public. But of course the authorship was not long a secret. It does not seem that the poet attached any high importance to the publication; indeed so careless had he been of the verses that in 1833 they were left behind in a lodging-house in Mornington Place, Hampstead Road, and only recovered by the diligence of Coventry Patmore. But if he hardly expected or wished the world to welcome the book, that was not because he felt the message unimportant; rather, perhaps, because he doubted the readiness of the world to receive such a message. It was a poem of what he had felt and known; it was intensely personal; but revolved from year to year in his mind, it had acquired a universal application. The history of a great sorrow was found to be the history of a soul. It was autobiography, but there was no egotism in it. As a representative of man, this man unfolded from within the thoughts, the longings, the doubts, the faith, which come to a strong and serious nature at such an epoch as this, in face of love and loss. The fragmentary form of the poem, and the

fact that for the public the allusions to the dead friend, and the series of events which the poem covers, were an unknown quantity, prevented the public from realising at first the bearing and the value of this great message.

We may estimate the effect which was produced by another reference to so typical a man as Hort. At first he, a boy of twenty, disapproved of the poem on the ground of its theology. Universalism, he thought, is not essential to sustain love. Five years later he finds *In Memoriam* the best food that he could find, though he still designates it with a slight depreciation as "bread of tears and water of affliction." In 1865, he recognises that he had not learnt to understand the poem when it came out. "In after years I have found great help from many of its thoughts. It is easy to understand how bewildering it often sounds to our elders, and something better may well be hoped for for our successors; but to our own generation few books I think speak with such force." And a little later he sums up the position, by quoting two passages from a diary, June 30 and July 23, 1850. "I procured *In Memoriam* at once. I think it is his worst thing, though there is much noble in it. But one hundred and twenty-nine lackadaisical laments on the same person cannot but be monotonous and dull even in his hands, etc." "Macmillan is very angry with me for saying this, and

bids me read again and again, which of course I shall do." Once more "I must read *In Memoriam* again, but bah! it has no spring in it; the *Lyra Apostolica* has more. I was well aware that it was not till some time later that the meaning and value of *In Memoriam* became really clear to me, but the discovery of this sort of language was quite an unexpected revelation, by no means soothing to one's self-esteem."<sup>1</sup>

If this was the reception of a peculiarly able and earnest young Cambridge man, who was eagerly enthusiastic for the work of his honoured teacher, it can cause no wonder that the indolent reviewers were entirely at sea in their judgments. Happily we are not concerned to estimate the ultimate place of this famous poem in the body of English poetry, and we are not just now called upon to point out its excellencies or its defects as poetry. What concerns us is the message which was thus conveyed, after sixteen years of sorrow and thought, by one who was resolved to write nothing but what he had felt and known.

There were two classes of men who very early began to recognise the significance of this message, a significance on which it is the more necessary to dwell, because it may easily be, as the thoughts of men are widening with the process of the suns, that the

<sup>1</sup> Hort's *Life and Letters*, i. 95, 251; ii. 61, 71.

message may become current, and its value may be unreasonably depreciated.

On the one hand, the religious leaders of the day who were most alive to the spiritual needs of men, immediately recognised that this was a definite step towards the reconciliation of religious thought and scientific truth. The poet's fight with doubt had been the triumph of faith; the truth of God, and the truth of the soul involved in the truth of God, had been presented with all the more clearness that it was seen emerging like the sun out of the engulfing shadows of the night. Robertson did not hesitate to say: "To my mind and heart the *most* satisfactory things that have been ever said on the future state are contained in this poem." Bishop Westcott was even then, and increasingly as years advanced, impressed with the poet's splendid faith in the growing purpose of the sum of life and in the noble destiny of the individual man as he offers himself for the fulfilment of his little part. If at first the free handling of religious problems perplexed and alarmed older people, as the relation of the thought to the discoveries and lessons of science was better understood, it became increasingly clear that this was a real *apologia pro Christianâ fide*.

On the other hand men who were occupied with science or who had acquired the scientific suspicion of dogmatics, Herschel, Owen, Sidgwick, Tyndall,



hailed with delight the knowledge of science displayed by the poet, and his obvious candour in accepting scientific conclusions. This was a temper much rarer fifty years ago than it is to-day, and it opened up to men who had identified religious faith with irrational dogma the prospect of a new marriage between knowledge and reverence in a new setting of the Christian verities. The noble prelude of the poem "Strong Son of God, Immortal Love," is not the first, but the latest thought, of the whole. It is the summing up of a prolonged discussion, and is prefixed to the discussion to indicate at the beginning how it is to end. While the religious mind was encouraged to plunge into the discussion because of this reassuring prelude, the scientific mind did not resent the prelude, because the discussion, fair and reasonable, followed.

The place which this brave challenge to doubt took in the thought of the time is expressed in a lucid account given by the late Prof. Henry Sidgwick of Cambridge. No other word spoken on the subject gives a more vivid impression of the spiritual service which was rendered, first by Arthur Hallam, and then by the love and yearning of the friend who had lost him. "Our views," he says, "on religious matters were not in harmony with those suggested by *In Memoriam*; they were more sceptical and less Christian." Clough represented the thought and senti-

ment of the time rather than Tennyson. "Hence the most important influence of *In Memoriam* on my thought . . . opened in a region, if I may say so, deeper down than the difference between Theism and Christianity; it lay in the unparalleled combination of intensity of feeling with comprehensiveness of view and balance of judgment, shown in presenting the *deepest* needs and perplexities of humanity. And this influence, I find, has increased rather than diminished as years have gone on, and as the great issues between Agnostic Science and Faith have become continually more prominent. . . . The struggle with what Carlyle used to call 'Hebrew old clothes' is over, Freedom is won, and what does Freedom bring us to? It brings us face to face with atheistic science; the faith in God and Immortality, which we had been struggling to clear from superstition, suddenly seems to be *in the air*; and in seeking for a firm basis for this faith we find ourselves in the midst of the fight with death which *In Memoriam* so powerfully presents. . . . Humanity will not and cannot acquiesce in a godless world. . . . The force with which it impressed this conviction was not due to the *mere intensity* of its expression of the feelings which Atheism outrages and Agnosticism ignores; but rather to its expression of them along with a reverent docility to the lessons of science which also belongs to the essence of the thought of our age.

The scientific view dominates his thoughts. . . . Had it been otherwise, had he met the atheistic tendencies of modern science with more confident defiance, more confident assertion of an intuitive faculty of theological knowledge, overriding the results laboriously reached by empirical science, I think his antagonism to these tendencies would have been far less impressive."

Professor Sidgwick then says that he can never read without tears the lines :

If e'er when faith had fallen asleep,  
I heard a voice : ' Believe no more '  
And heard an ever-breaking shore  
That tumbled in the godless deep ;  
A warmth within the heart would melt  
The freezing reason's colder part,  
And like a man in wrath the heart  
Stood up and answered ' I have felt.'

"I feel in them," he adds, "the indestructible and inalienable minimum of faith which humanity cannot give up because it is necessary for life ; and which I know that I, at least so far as the man in me is deeper than the methodical thinker, cannot give up. . . . The faith thus restored is, for the poet, unquestionably a form of Christian faith ; there seems to him then no reason for doubting that the

Sinless years  
That breathed beneath the Syrian blue,

and the marvel of life continued after the bodily death, were a manifestation of the immortal love

which by faith we embrace as the essence of the Divine nature. . . . Faith must give the last word, but the last word is not the whole utterance of the truth; the whole truth is that assurance and doubt must alternate in the moral world in which we at present live, somewhat as night and day alternate in the physical world."

These deeper thinkers read the poet's intention, which was, as he put it himself, to show "the different moods of sorrow dramatically given, and my conviction that fear, doubts, and suffering will find answer and relief only through faith in a God of Love."

Partly of set purpose, and acting, as we may well believe, under the breath of the Spirit, he had struck a blow, the deftest blow that could then be struck, in the cause of faith. He too, like Milton in his day, like Dante in his—may we not add like Aeschylus in his—had in the exercise of the poet's high function been justifying the ways of God to man.

It was not however till the reverent hand of the son drew back the curtain and permitted us to look into the poet's private thought that we could possibly understand how the message, presented in the most gorgeous poetic form, was indeed the lowliest and sincerest expression of the inward life. He affected the thinking world of his time not by the brilliance of the expression, nor even by the power and completeness of the thought, but by the sanctity of the

unseen life. "This is a terrible age of unfaith," he would say. "I hate utter unfaith. I cannot endure that men should sacrifice everything at the cold altar of what with their imperfect knowledge they choose to call truth and reason. One can easily lose all belief, through giving up the continual thought and care for spiritual things. . . . In this vale of Time the hills of Time often shut out the mountains of Eternity. . . . I dare hardly name His name, but take away belief in the self-conscious personality of God and you take away the backbone of the world. . . . On God and Godlike men we build our trust." The anthem he wrote for Balliol Chapel, and embodied in *De Profundis* years after must have always been singing itself in his life,

We feel we are nothing—for all is Thou and in Thee ;  
We feel we are something—that also has come from Thee ;  
We know we are nothing—but Thou wilt help us to be.  
Hallowed be Thy name—Hallelujah !

Whenever the mystery or the suffering of the world shook his serenity for a time, he always recovered himself by the power of faith ; "Yet God *is* love," he would say, "transcendent, all pervading. We do not get *this* faith from Nature or the world. If we look at Nature alone, full of perfection and imperfection, she tells us that God is disease, murder and rapine. We get this faith from ourselves, from what is highest within us, which recognises that there is

not one fruitless pang, just as there is not one lost good."

Once after reading Rom. viii. he said: "For myself, the world is the shadow of God." He constantly dwelt on the Supreme mystery of human Free Will, and urged the consequent responsibility which lies upon every human being. "If a man is merely to be a bundle of sensations," he said to a young man entering the University, "he had better not exist at all. He should embark on his career in the spirit of selfless and adventurous heroism; should develop his true self by not shirking responsibility, by casting aside all maudlin and introspective morbidities, and by using his powers cheerfully in accordance with the obvious dictates of his moral consciousness, and so far as possible in harmony with what he feels to be the Absolute Right.

Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control,  
These three alone lead life to sovereign power.

The love of God is the true basis of duty, truth, reverence, loyalty, love, virtue and work. I believe in these although I feel the emptiness and hollowness of much in life. Be ye perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect."

"My most passionate desire," he said once to his son, "is to have a clearer and fuller vision of God. The soul seems to me one with God, how I cannot tell. I can sympathise with God in my poor little

way." He believed in prayer. "Prayer on our part is the highest aspiration of the soul. . . . Prayer is, to take a mundane simile, like opening a sluice between the great ocean and our little channels, when the great sea gathers itself together and flows in at full tide." His own prayer in sorrow often was only, "O Thou Infinite, Amen." He had a boundless admiration for the Sermon on the Mount and the Parables—"perfection beyond compare" he called them—but he would say: "Christianity with its Divine morality but without the central figure of Christ, *the* Son of Man, would become cold, and it is fatal for religion to lose its warmth: *the* Son of Man was the most tremendous title possible; the forms of Christianity will alter, but the Spirit of Christ will grow from more to more in the roll of the ages." He would dwell on the pathetic utterances of the Cross and would say: "I am always amazed when I read the New Testament at the splendour of Christ's purity and holiness and at His infinite pity." But he disliked discussions on the nature of Christ, saying "none knoweth the Son but the Father."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "It was in the spirit of an old saint or mystic," Jowett says, "and not of a modern rationalist, that Tennyson habitually thought and felt about the nature of Christ. Never did the slightest shadow of ridicule or profaneness mix itself with the applications which he made of Scripture, although he was quite aware that there were many points on which he differed widely from the so-called Evangelical or High Church world; and he always strove to keep religion free from the taint of ridicule."

It is necessary to review his religious position at this point, because, as Jowett also tells us, he considered that *In Memoriam* contained what he had to say on religion. The great poem was the expression of a strenuous and earnest soul, living in an age of science and unfaith, but battling to a true faith by a frank reconciliation between science and religion. Dr Stopford Brooke regrets his scientific exactness and feels that its intrusion into the poems sometimes spoils the poetry. But it is well to remember, he was not only a poet, he was also a teacher; and it was this passion for science which enabled him to lay the hand of religion on the scientific men of the day, and to vindicate religion itself, by bringing to it the sane spirit of science, which also is the Spirit of God.

It was a beautiful coincidence that the utterance of this fullest and most fruitful religious message was crowned immediately by the fulfilment of his long and deeply cherished desire. *In Memoriam* was published in June 1850. On the 13th of that month the poet married the woman whom he had welcomed as an Oread or Dryad twenty years before, and for whom he had patiently waited. Moxon the publisher was willing to advance money on *In Memoriam*. This, with the pension, and with a poet's faith and a wise man's economy, justified him in asking for his bride. The wedding took place in that quaint and quiet



church at Shiplake, which stands in sylvan solitude with only a wooded chalk pit between it and a lovely reach of the Thames. His old friend, Drummond Rawnsley, performed the ceremony, and for fee had a friend's blessing and nothing more. Emily Sellwood's father came of an old Somerset family, and to save it from ruin, had taken up the profession of a solicitor; her mother, the sister of Sir John Franklin, had died in 1816. There were two little bridesmaids, Mary and Margaret Rawnsley, otherwise there was no marriage pageant. But, as the bridegroom said long years after, "The peace of God came into my life before the altar when I wedded her." As they drove away from the church the happy heart sang; the song was half humorous, half rapturous, and directed to the man who had read the service.

Sweetly, smoothly flow your life.

Never tithed unpaid perplex you,  
Parish feud or party strife,

All things please you, nothing vex you,  
You have given me such a wife.

Hers was a tender and spiritual nature, but the poet was proud of her intellect, and found her his wisest counsellor and best critic in all his work. She had a delightful humour; and that protective motherly heart which, to all men, and especially to a shy and sensitive nature like the poet's, is the most priceless gift which a woman can give. Once

or twice in the published poems, for instance in the lyric, *Dear, near and true*, in the *Daisy*, and in the introduction to the last volume, the *Death of Ænone*, he gives expression to his feeling for his wife, but we are dependent on the few glimpses which their son has afforded us for a revelation of one of those ideal relationships which are the very salt of human life. "If it were possible with propriety," said Jowett, "I should like to say something about the wife. . . . I can only speak of her as one of the most beautiful, the purest, the most innocent, the most disinterested persons whom I have ever known. He once told me . . . how she said to him, 'When I pray I see the face of God smiling upon me.' Such is the spirit of this remarkable life. . . . It is no wonder that people speak of her with bated breath, as a person whom no one would ever think of criticising, whom everyone would recognise, in goodness and saintliness as the most unlike anyone whom they have ever met. . . . The greatest influence of his life would have to be passed over if I were to omit her name. These few lines I have ventured to insert . . . lest by some inadvertence matters so important should pass out of remembrance."

For five and forty years they lived together in the peace of God. Whenever he was away, he wrote a letter-diary for her; whenever he was at home,

she was his home. From that happy day at Ship-lake, he was like a mariner who had entered port,—like the traveller of his own brilliant imagination, who had found the happy Isles. The loyalty which waited twenty years was rewarded with the fruition of forty-five. And that last little volume which came from the aged poet, contained a love-song as sweet as any he could have sung in his passionate youth, more touching, some of us may think, than anything he ever wrote, as gratitude and fidelity are a more truly moving spectacle than the un-governed raptures of an untried love. With a characteristic shyness of opening the secret of his heart, he called this gem of love songs: *June bracken and heather*, and addressed it: To —,

There on the top of the down,  
The wild heather round me and over me June's high blue,  
When I looked at the bracken so bright and the heather so  
brown,  
I thought to myself I would offer this book to you,  
This, and my love together,  
To you that are seventy-seven,  
With a faith as clear as the heights of the June-blue heaven,  
And a fancy as summer-new  
As the green of the bracken amid the gloom of the heather.

It is better as a poem than that written on June 13, 1850, his wedding day; there is in it a lighter lilt; there is in it a truer music; but its beauty is not its chief value; the loyalty it expresses is nobler than the form in which it is expressed. Only the best of

men win a love like hers, or are able to respond to it with a love like his. There is something which must not be permitted, from a false modesty, to evade us in this woman, who after nearly half a century of married life was to her husband like the heights of the June-blue heaven, and had a fancy as summer-new as the green of the bracken amid the gloom of the heather. It tells us much about her, much that is graceful, and distinguished, and attractive. But it tells us also much about him; it shows us the young man's fancy kindled to a constant devotion, and maintained in old age with the strength of the years added to the freshness of its dawn. And if we admit that it was the rare goodness of God which gave to him such a wife, we may also admit that loyalty of this kind from youth to age, love deepening with the years, the chivalry of a husband answering to the passion of the lover, deserves the recognition and the gratitude of men. So to love and to be loved is part of that saintliness of life by which humanity is moved onward, and the upper reaches of the tableland are made more accessible. "I have known many women who were excellent, one in one way, another in another way," he said one evening in a kind of soliloquy among his friends shortly after his marriage, "but this woman is the noblest woman I have ever known."

The wedding tour began with a visit to the sacred ground at Clevedon where Arthur Hallam was laid; then they went to Glastonbury; then to the lakes where Mrs Tennyson met and received the approval of Carlyle. The Marshalls offered them Tent Lodge as a permanent residence, but the new poet was not a child of the mountains like the old one then drawing near to his end among the Cumbrian hills; and the married couple were to make a home for themselves in the South, where the downs and the sea were more intelligible to them than the Tarns and the Fells of the North. But if Tennyson was not to live where Wordsworth had lived, he was now to take up the office which Wordsworth had held, and to carry on the noble tradition of "him who uttered nothing base."

In this year 1850 Wordsworth died. On November 4th Tennyson was at the Lushingtons' Park House; they were looking about for a place in which to pitch their tent; and he had a dream. He dreamed that Prince Albert came and kissed him on the cheek, and that he himself said in the odd way of dreams, "Very kind, but very German." In the morning a letter arrived which had actually owed its origin to Prince Albert's admiration of *In Memoriam*; it was the offer from the Queen of the Poet-Laureateship: "To make the continuance of this office," it ran, "in harmony with public opinion, the Queen feels that it is neces-

sary that it should be limited to a name bearing such distinction in the literary world as to do credit to the appointment, and it was under this feeling that Her Majesty in the first instance offered the appointment to Mr Rogers, who stated to Her Majesty in his reply that the only reason which compelled him gratefully to decline Her Majesty's gracious intention was that his great age rendered him unfit to receive any new office. It is under the same desire that the name of the poet appointed should adorn the office, that I have received the commands of the Queen to offer this post to you, as a mark of Her Majesty's appreciation of your literary distinction."

The splendour and world-wide fame of the laureateship was made by Tennyson himself. Until he put on the official robes the office was hardly more conspicuous than any other of the titular distinctions which scintillate about a Court. To such a height did he raise the prestige of the post, such significance did he give to the beautiful old word laureate, that when he died many thought it better that the office should cease.

The distinction has now been restored to the level which humanity may more easily hope to maintain. It was not difficult to succeed Southey, nor would it have been difficult to succeed Rogers. When Wordsworth went, Tennyson was there to succeed him. And now that the difficulty of succeeding Tennyson

has been surmounted, the office may be trusted to survive in the stately pageantry of the Court, as it has done with varying fortune for nearly four centuries.

We may then overestimate the distinction of the appointment, and Tennyson was in doubt whether to accept it. He humorously said that he was only persuaded to do so by Venables who solemnly told him that if he became Poet-Laureate, he would always when he dined out be offered the liver-wing of a fowl! However, he did accept it, and the relation established between him and his Sovereign, a relation of manly independence and chivalrous loyalty on the one side, and of grateful appreciation and friendship on the other, was one of the most beautiful incidents in the beautiful private life of Queen Victoria.

The first home was a house at Warninglid, Sussex. But a storm shattered it; they found that it had been a Roman Catholic building, a baby was buried in it, and a notorious thief had lived there. They left it incontinently. Early in 1851 they settled at Chapel House, Montpelier Row, Twickenham. On the old staircase, which rose out of a fine square hall, stood the carved figure of a bishop, as if to bless all who entered. And here, on April 20th, the wedded pair entered into the first sacred experiences of birth and death in their own home. For the Poet of

Immortality it was a strange and pathetic incident. A dead child was born. "It was Easter Day, and at his birth," said the father, "I heard the great roll of the organ, of the uplifted psalm, in the chapel adjoining the house. Dead as he was I felt proud of him. To-day when I write this down the remembrance of it rather overcomes me; but I am glad that I have seen him. Dear little nameless one that hast lived though thou hast never breathed, I, thy father, love thee and weep over thee, though thou hast no place in the universe. Who knows? it may be thou hast. God's will be done."

Thus at the middle point of life, at the age of forty-two, this pilgrim poet, charged with a message to his age, had given to the world the great poem of faith and triumph in Death, had attained the desire of his heart in a union with his ideal woman, had been recognised by the world of literature, and chosen by his Queen to be her court poet, and had touched the chilly hand of death in his new home.



## Chapter V

### Farringford and Maud, 1852-1862

“Down from the mountain  
And over the level,  
And streaming and shining on  
Silent river, silvery willow,  
Pasture and plowland,  
Horses and oxen,  
Innocent maidens,  
Garrulous children,  
Homestead and harvest,  
Reaper and gleaner,  
And rough ruddy faces,  
Of lowly labour,  
Slided the Gleam.”

THE year 1850 was the most eventful in the poet's life. The hopes deferred had been fulfilled; and honours which he had never expected had fallen upon him. “The peace of God had entered into his life.” Enjoying the most perfect form of human companionship, increasingly recognised and honoured by the whole community, from the Queen upon the throne to the workman in the factory or the fisherman on the coast, relieved from temporal anxieties and set free for the prosecution of his mission, he

entered on tranquillity and joy in which his poems were able to reach their natural maturity.

"Perhaps no true poet," wrote Mrs Browning in January of this year, "having claims upon attention *solely* through his poetry, has attained so certain a success with such short delay. Instead of being pelted (as nearly every true poet has been), he stands already on a pedestal, and is recognised as a master spirit not by a coterie but by the great public."<sup>1</sup>

The twelve years which followed were a period of unusual excitement in public affairs. And with astonishing energy he entered into the ferment of the time, bringing with him his lofty vision and inward peace.

First of all came the great Exhibition of 1851 with its splendid hopes of expanding commerce and universal peace. But the brilliant dawn passed rapidly into a day of threatening cloud, and the poet used his gift of song to rouse the spirit of his countrymen against the dreaded invasion of the French, and the actual usurpation of Louis Napoleon. *Britons, guard your own, Hands all round, The third of February*, and later on *Riflemen, form*,<sup>2</sup> were the outcome of this patriotic fervour. He had a pro-

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, vol. i. p. 431.

<sup>2</sup> Mrs Browning amusingly declared that the fort which spoiled Farringford was in poetic justice his punishment for writing these bellicose poems, especially *Riflemen, form*.



*Farrington*

*Frith & Co.*



found conviction that his country was the chosen witness of Freedom in the world ; and he had a corresponding anxiety to purge her from the internal evils which threatened her spiritual freedom :

That man's the true Conservative  
 Who lops the mouldered branch away.  
 We likewise have our evil things ;  
 Too much we make our ledgers gods.

The fire of these poems might easily be applied to inflammable material and move a country to war. But it was a noble fire, and the greatness of Tennyson as an Englishman cannot be understood apart from these rousing lays :

We love not this French God, this child of Hell,  
 Wild War, who broke the converse of the wise ;  
 But though we love kind Peace so well,  
 We dare not even by silence sanction lies.

Though niggard throats of Manchester may bawl,  
 What England was, shall her true sons forget ?  
 We are not cotton-spinners all,  
 But some love England and her honour yet,  
 And these in her Thermopylæ shall stand  
 And hold against the world this honour of the land.

In November 1852 came the death of the Duke of Wellington which gave the poet a great opportunity to address his countrymen on what seemed to him the real greatness of the land he loved. Six years before, Milnes had wished to introduce him to Wellington, and his characteristic reply

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had been: "No, why should the great Duke be bothered by a poor poet like me?" But he saw him once riding out of the Horse Guards, and the salutation was recorded in two lines of the poem:

No more in soldier fashion will he greet  
With lifted hand the gazer in the street.

The Ode which as poet-laureate he wrote for the funeral was not well received. "I hope you enjoy Tennyson's Ode," wrote Hort<sup>1</sup> from Cambridge, "which I hear sadly abused here. At first I could not make it out; the words *seemed* nothing remarkable, but there was a mystery about the music of them. Another reading, however, enabled me to get into the spirit of them and feel their grandeur. For metre I know nothing equal." So violent was the abuse of the press that the author wrote magnanimously to his publisher: "If you lose by the Ode, I will not consent to accept the whole sum of £200 which you offered me. I consider it quite a sufficient loss if you do not gain by it."

As we turn back to the poem after the lapse of half a century, we may be inclined to accept the less favourable view of its poetic merit. In contrast, for instance, with Wordsworth's *Happy*

<sup>1</sup> Hort's *Life*, i. 236

*Warrior*, we may feel that Nelson, "who was great by sea" has been more permanently commemorated in those simple lines, than Wellington, "who was great by land," in the rich music of the Ode. But as an utterance of the poet's life and thought, as a means of judging a man by what he most admires, the poem has a true biographical value.

It is the path of duty that is the way to glory.

He that ever following her commands,  
 On with toil of heart and knees and hands,  
 Through the long gorge to the far light has won  
 His path upward, and prevailed,  
 Shall find the toppling crags of Duty scaled,  
 Are close upon the shining tablelands  
 To which our God Himself is moon and sun.

• • • • •  
 What know we greater than the soul?  
 On God and Godlike men we build our trust.

• • • in the vast cathedral leave him,  
 God accept him, Christ receive him.

Whatever may be thought of this as poetry, it is priceless as the expression of the poet's faith, of the steady motive of his own life, of the ideal which he would set before his countrymen for their imitation. Those who best knew Tennyson and were best able to judge him, always recognised that his function was that of a teacher even more than that of a poet. This year saw the commencement of the friendship with Jowett, the Master of Balliol. No man was

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better able to estimate Tennyson than Jowett, and no one had more opportunity, for a visit to Farringford at Christmas became a recognised event of the year, and their intercourse was not confined to a yearly visit. The correspondence was chiefly with Mrs Tennyson, or even with the children, but the letters were written for Tennyson's eye. Jowett was constantly suggesting subjects for poems. *The Grandmother* was the result of his suggestion on the unobserved poetry of old age, and his admiration for the poet as a prophet and teacher of his time bordered on veneration. "What a volume of them there is," he wrote, speaking of the poems, "and how astonishingly good! To me and others they made epochs in our own life at the time at which we first read them. They never did us any harm but the greatest good. They opened our minds in the best manner to the new ideas of the nineteenth century." And here is a memorable picture recorded by an eye-witness. "Tennyson read to us several of his poems, ending with the Ode in memory of the Duke of Wellington (one of Jowett's heroes), a poem which he read with wonderful effect. He read the opening with the suggestion of the deep tones of the passing bell :

" Bury the great Duke  
With an Empire's lamentation,  
Let us bury the great Duke  
To the noise of the mourning of a mighty nation."



“ No one who has heard the poet read it can forget the *abandon* and simplicity of his rendering of the concluding lines. . . .

“ There was silence when Tennyson finished. Then he turned to Jowett to ask him some question. No answer came. We looked at the Master, and tears were streaming from his eyes. It was some minutes before he could speak.

“ His feeling for the poet was a thing not to be forgotten. He looked upon Tennyson as in some sense the great prophet of his time, though he was also alive to all the human aspects of his character and conversation. I remember Tennyson telling me of Jowett’s endeavour, when he thought himself to be dying, to persuade Tennyson to write a great prayer to be sung by all men of all creeds in these latter days.”<sup>1</sup> This estimate of Jowett’s is remarkable for two reasons; it was based on an unusual intimacy, for after Hallam’s death, there was no friend more devoted, and with the exception of his wife no one could have known him better. But further, Jowett was essentially critical, and while his judgments were never unkindly, they were seldom indulgent. Among all the prominent men of the century it would be difficult to name one whose commendation, hearty and unreserved, meant so much. And if it should ever come to pass that Tennyson’s value as a teacher should become obsolete,

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Benjamin Jowett*, ii. 419, 420.

because the lesson will have been learned, or because new teachers should become more capable of teaching the old truths to new times, yet it may be remembered that in the opinion of the Master of Balliol, Tennyson was the great teacher of the eventful period in which he lived and wrote. Nor did Jowett stand alone. Frederick Denison Maurice, the most original English theologian of the middle of the century, wrote in joyfully accepting the office of godfather: "I have so very much to thank you for, especially of late years, since I have known your poetry better, and I hope I have been somewhat more in a condition to learn from it, that I cannot say how thankful I feel to you for wishing that I should stand in any nearer or more personal relation to you." Ruskin was another of those who profoundly influenced the century, and he wrote, "By several untoward chances I have been too long hindered from telling you face to face how much I owe you. So you see at last I seize the wheel of Fortune by its nearest spoke, begging you with the heartiest entreaty I can, to tell me when you are likely to be in London. . . . Any day will do for me, if you give me notice two or three days before, but please come soon, for I have much to say to you, and am eager to say it, above all to tell you how for a thousand things I am gratefully and respectfully yours——"

Maurice a few years later dedicated to him a

volume of Theological Essays. And the testimony of this dedication to the influence he exercised on the thought of the time is the more valuable because the writer was incapable of flattery: "I have maintained in these essays that a Theology which does not correspond to the deepest thoughts and feelings of human beings cannot be a true Theology. Your writings have taught me to enter into many of these thoughts and feelings. Will you forgive me the presumption of offering you a book which at least acknowledges them and does them homage?" Remembering that Tennyson was the most popular and the most widely read poet of his time—read perhaps more widely in his lifetime than ever poet had been—we are apt to forget that he was also, by their own humble and grateful acknowledgment, the teacher of the Teachers of his age.

At this time two prominent painters, Watts and Millais, and the sculptor, Thomas Woolner, attempted to record the poet's appearance; but there are two word portraits which can go where paintings cannot; and they preserve more lastingly the features of the man who was exercising this extraordinary influence. Sydney Dobell, the poet, describing him to Briton Rivière said: "If he were pointed out to you as the man who had written the *Iliad* you would answer, I can well believe it." And Caroline Fox who saw him in Cornwall, gave this striking description:

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"Tennyson is a grand specimen of a man, with a magnificent head set on his shoulders like the capital of a mighty pillar. His hair is long and wavy and covers a massive head. He wears a beard and moustache, which one begrudges, as hiding so much of that firm forceful but finely-chiselled mouth. His eyes are large, grey (?) and open wide when a subject interests him ; they are well shaded by the noble brow with its strong lines of thought and suffering. I can quite understand Sam Laurence calling it the best balance of head he had ever seen."

Chapel House, Twickenham, was not only the birthplace of the Ode, but it gave the poet one of the most solemn joys of his life. On August 11, at 9.30 A.M., Hallam Tennyson was born there. "I have seen beautiful things in my life," wrote the father to John Forster, "but I never saw anything more beautiful than the mother's face as she lay by the young child an hour or two after, or heard anything sweeter than the little lamb-like bleat of the young one. I had fancied that children after birth had been all shriek and roar ; but he gave out a little note of satisfaction every now and then, as he lay by his mother, which was the most pathetic sound in its helplessness I ever listened to." A few days later he added, "I found him lying alone on the third day of his life, and while I was looking at him I saw him looking at me with such apparently earnest wide

open eyes, I felt as awestruck as if I had seen a spirit."

Among the greetings, on this new joy in the home, was a letter from Mrs Browning and her husband, so moving, that Tennyson says, "I began to read it to my wife, but could not get on with it, so I put it away by her bedside, and she shall read it as soon as she can read anything." He was profoundly affected by the new sensation of fatherhood, and by the mysterious wonder of child life. His strong nature expanded as it were under a new revelation. Speaking of babies he would say, "There is something gigantic about them. The wide-eyed wonder of a babe has a grandeur in it which as children they lose. They seem to me to be prophets of a mightier race."

Yet if he was fascinated by babies, he did not surrender his interest as they grew into children. He was the play-fellow of his own children and left upon them ineffaceable marks. "The chief anxiety of my parents," says the eldest, "was that we should be strictly truthful, and my father's words spoken long ago, still dwell with me, 'a truthful man generally has all virtues.' He was very particular about our being courteous to the poor. The severest punishment he ever gave me, though that was, it must be confessed, slight, was for some want of respect to one of our servants." And though it is anticipating, the first

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letter written to his boy, then eight years old, must be given. It is dated Tintagel, where he was watching the shore on which his King Arthur was mysteriously thrown up by the infinite sea—August 25, 1860. “My dear Hallam, I was very glad to receive your little letter. Mind that you and Lionel do not quarrel and vex poor mamma who has lots of work to do ; and learn your lessons regularly ; for gentlemen and ladies will not take you for a gentleman when you are grown up, if you are ignorant. Here are great black cliffs of slate rock, and deep black caves, and the ruined castle of Arthur, and I wish that you and Lionel and mamma were here to see them. Give my love to grandpapa and to Lionel and work well at your lessons. I shall be glad to find you know more and more every day—your loving papa—A. TENNYSON.”

It was the wonder of this child's birth that suggested the poem which afterwards grew into *De Profundis*, beginning—

Out of the deep, my child, out of the deep.

We are told that after his marriage he began to read philosophy, Fichte, Schelling, Kant, Hegel. And though he never became in any formal sense a philosopher, a certain philosophical element entered into his poetry and grew. More than one philosopher has learnt the deepest lessons from the obser-

vation of the birth and the development of the child. It is Tennyson the poet, touched by Tennyson the philosopher, and moved to song by Tennyson the father, that wrote those remarkable lines, lines which search the depths of consciousness :

O dear spirit half lost  
 In thine own shadow and this fleshly sign  
 That thou art thou—who wailest being born  
 And banished into mystery, and the pain  
 Of this divisible-indivisible world  
 Among the numerable innumerable  
 Sun, sun and sun, thro' finite-infinite space  
 In finite-infinite Time—our mortal veil  
 And shattered phantom of that Infinite One  
 Who made Thee inconceivably Thyself,  
 Out of His whole World-self and all in all—  
 Live thou ! and of the grain and husk, the grape  
 And ivyberry, choose, and still depart  
 From death to death thro' life and life, and find  
 Nearer and ever nearer Him who wrought  
 Not matter, nor the finite-infinite,  
 But this main miracle that thou art thou,  
 With power on thine own act and on the world.

This statement of the antinomies of thought, combined with this vision of the mystery of consciousness, may not be popular poetry—Lucretius was never popular as Virgil was—but it represents the growth of the poet's soul in its wrestle with the problems of being, and justifies the estimate which such men as Maurice and Jowett formed of his capacity as a thinker.

In the beginning of 1853 the University of Edin-

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burgh recognised his position as a leader by wishing to nominate him as Rector. He could not entertain the thought of giving an inaugural address which would be required; and he refused, though he was gratefully sensible of the honour. In the autumn of this year the little family moved to Farringford, the house on the downs above Fresh water bay, within a walk of the Needles, which was to be for forty years the poet's workshop and home. At Twickenham, London and its inhabitants were always within reach; "lots of callers, I expect I shall be inundated," was one of the earliest observations on the suburban home. Tennyson wished to get away into the country, away from society, that he might have some control over the invasion of friends, and might give himself to earnest and concentrated work. No doubt as a poet he welcomed the beauty of that part of the Isle of Wight, and the pleasant associations of the mediæval priory, which had left a record of itself in local names, Maiden's Croft, Prior's Field, Clerk's Hill, Abraham's Mead, etc. But the real attraction was its remoteness from the haunts of men; and what finally determined him to leave it was the invasion of the builder and the crowd. The poet's chance of serving men depended very much upon his seclusion from them; he had to see visions and to dream dreams, a thing for him impossible in the rush of society. He did



not shut himself from his kind; both he and his wife tended the sick and the poor of the village, and entered into friendly relations with their neighbours; and guests were constantly coming and going, guests who have left the loveliest pictures of that ideal home. But the life lived there was one of strenuous toil. Every object in nature was carefully observed. He provided spy-glasses to watch the ways and movements of the birds. Geology was systematically pursued. And on the housetop a platform was made for the observation of the stars. Much of the work was necessarily solitary, but much he shared with the wife, whose intellect was hardly less helpful to him than her heart. He would read books of all kinds to her; for instance he would freely translate the *Odyssey* for her, to give her some idea of its movement and melody. When the title-deeds were finally secured she made an entry on April 24, 1856, in that journal, which tells us something of that holy companionship, "This ivied home among the pine-trees is ours. Went to our withy holt, such beautiful blue hyacinths, orchises, primroses, daisies, marsh marigolds and cuckoo flowers. Wild cherry trees too with single snowy blossom and the hawthorns white with their pearls of May. The park has for many days been rich with cowslips and furze in bloom. The elms are a golden wreath at the foot of the

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down, to the north of the house the mespilus and horse chestnut are in flower and the apple trees are covered with rosy buds. A. dug the bed ready for the rhododendrons. A thrush was singing among the nightingales and other birds, as he said 'mad with joy.' At sunset, the golden green of the trees, the burning splendour of Blackgang Chine and St Catherine's, and the red bank of the primeval view, contrasted with the turkis blue of the sea (that is our view from the drawing-room); make altogether a miracle of beauty. We are glad that Farringford is ours."

Another woman's pen has given us a glimpse into the interior. "The house at Farringford," writes Mrs Ritchie, "itself seemed like a charmed palace with green walls without, and speaking walls within. There hung Dante with his solemn nose and wreath; Italy gleamed over the doorways; friends' faces lined the passages, books filled the shelves and a glow of crimson was everywhere; the great oriel drawing-room window was full of green and golden leaves, of the sounds of birds and of the distant seas." Here the poet lived his studious and retired life for forty years, ranging over the Downs in his ample cloak, making fun with the village children—"make the lives of children as beautiful and happy as possible" was a favourite saying of his—often annoying his friends by his negligence in correspon-

dence, but always welcoming and loving them when they appeared, giving them the impression which he gave to Thackeray, that he was not a dreamer or a poet only, but "the wisest man he ever knew."

On March 16, 1854, the second boy Lionel was born, and the name was chosen because the father received the news when he was watching the planet Mars "as he glowed like a ruddy shield on the Lion's breast." The words written at the time of this second great joy show the depths of feeling in a poet's nature. "The first we had was born dead (a great grief to us), really the finest boy of the three; and I nearly broke my heart with going to look at him. He lay like a little warrior, having fought the fight and failed, with his hands clenched and a frown on his brow. . . . If my latest born were to die to-night, I do not think that I should suffer so much as I did, looking on that noble little fellow who had never seen the light. My wife who had had a most terrible time, lasting near the whole of one Easter Sunday, never saw him. Well for her." After all, Tennyson may be best summed up by saying, he loved much.

Among the circle of friends were the Simeons, Aubrey de Vere and Baron de Schroeter from Swainston, all Roman Catholics. The baron was most anxious to convert the Tennysons. Aubrey de Vere, when he first saw Hallam, was struck by his contem-

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plative eyes, and said, "When that child grows to be a man he must be a Carthusian monk." "Nothing of the sort" was the father's answer, "but a happy husband and a happy father in a happy home." That sanctity which consists in crushing the affections, and making such relations as existed between the poet and his wife and sons impossible—the sanctity which the Roman Church inculcates in its priests, and admires in its saints—had no charm for his wholesome mind. Few studies in the ideals of life would be more interesting than a comparison between Manning and Newman the Roman type of saint, on the one hand, and their contemporaries Gladstone and Tennyson, with their ideal homes illustrating and commending their saintly lives, on the other hand.

But if Sir John Simeon did not convert his friend to Rome he rendered him a great service by incidentally suggesting the subject of *Maud*. On the little poem "Oh that 'twere possible" he remarked that it needed a previous poem to explain it. Tennyson adopted the idea, and then tried a previous poem to explain that. Thus pushing backward he gradually worked out the whole lyrical drama. This beautiful creation was the first product of Farringford. Many of the descriptions of Nature are taken from observations of natural phenomena there.

But before *Maud* saw the light, another of the

great commotions of these years occurred, in the outbreak of the Crimean War. The poet, like the rest of his countrymen, watched the progress of events with intense interest, and felt the sufferings in the trenches as if they had been his own. On Dec. 2nd, 1854, reading in the *Times* the description of the Charge of the Light Brigade, and the single remark, "Someone had blundered," he sat down and in a few minutes composed *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, which was the greatest service which he or any man could render to the soldiers who were engaged in that unhappy war. "The greatest service you can do just now," wrote a chaplain to the S.P.G., "is to send out on printed slips Mr A. T.'s 'Charge at Balaclava.'" The poet had a thousand copies struck off and sent to the men. Many have criticised these famous lines, but no one can deny that they produced an immediate effect, and accomplished good. It was like the organ-voice of England chanting the requiem of her brave, and every soldier's heart glowed with a new feeling of duty and devotion. What Florence Nightingale did for the suffering bodies, the poet did for the spirits of the men.

Early in the new year 1855 came the news of the loss of Sir John Franklin, Mrs Tennyson's uncle. Not only was the loss commemorated by the poem on the cenotaph, the most perfect thing of the kind the poet wrote :

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Not here, the white north has thy bones ; and thou,  
Heroic sailor soul,  
Art passing on thy happier voyage now  
Toward no earthly pole,

but a huge rock column in the Polar Seas to the north of Lat. 79 bears the name "Tennyson's Monument" and thus establishes the connection between "the heroic sailor soul" and the no less heroic poet soul.

On June 6th of this year, Oxford conferred on the Poet-Laureate the highest honour she could bestow, by giving him the honorary degree of D.C.L. The undergraduates in the Sheldonian Theatre accorded him a great ovation. And their shouts of "In Memoriam," "Alma," "Inkermann," showed that they recognised in the author of *In Memoriam* a national leader in the Crimean War. That noisy assembly is not wont to yield honour to intellectual achievement ; its plaudits are reserved for soldiers, statesmen and men of action ; while the greatest writers and men of science are allowed to pass unnoticed or with good-natured banter. The reception given to the poet was a tribute to the fact that he who writes the people's songs is the leader of the nation ; and Tennyson had come to that post of authority by universal acclamation.

This honour was followed by what seemed to be a rebuff. When *Maud* was published at the end of the year 1855, it was met by a perfect storm of

criticism, contempt, and contumely. Before referring to this curious episode, we may glance at the author through the eyes of two other poets, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. On a certain evening in October, Tennyson spent some hours with the Brownings in Dorset Square. "He did so much and left such a voice," wrote Mrs Browning "(both him 'and a voice!') crying out 'Maud' to us, and helping the effect of the poem by the personality, that it's an increase of joy and life to us for ever. . . . Though I was hindered (through having women friends with me, whom I loved and yet could not help wishing a little further just then) from sitting in the smoke and hearing the talk of the next room, yet I heard some sentences which, in this materialistic low talking world, it was comfort and triumph to hear from the lips of such a man." And to another correspondent: "One of the pleasantest things which has happened to us here is the coming down on us of the Laureate, who, being in London three or four days from the Isle of Wight, spent two of them with us, dined with us, smoked with us, opened his heart to us (and the second bottle of port), and ended by reading 'Maud' through from end to end, and going away at half-past two in the morning. If I had had a heart to spare, certainly he would have won mine. He is captivating with his frankness, con-

finingness, and unexampled *naïveté*. Think of his stopping in 'Maud' every now and then—"there's a wonderful touch! That's very tender! How beautiful that is!" Yes, and it *was* wonderful, tender, beautiful, and he read exquisitely in a voice like an organ, rather music than speech."<sup>1</sup> And Rossetti said, "He is quite as glorious in his way as Browning in his, and perhaps of the two even more impressive on the whole personally."

But the prophet, as often happens to prophets, was now to be misunderstood. *Maud* is a lyrical monologue. The supposed speaker is a bitter and disappointed man whose nature is temporarily lifted above itself by a great and pure love entering into his life. But the love is removed and the soul relapses into despair and even madness. The utterances of such a man in all dramatic propriety are not balanced or even edifying. He says many foolish things. In the outbreak of the Crimean War, for example, he sees the shock which is to regenerate a luxurious and self-indulgent country absorbed in commerce. Now strange to say, the bulk of readers and critics did not observe the dramatic character of the poem, and supposed that this darkened and maddened misanthrope was the poet himself. They did not even observe the denouement; for the unhappy youth emerges at the end from his mad-

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, ii. 213.



ness, and gives himself up to work for mankind in the unselfishness born of his great love.

The poem is the most beautiful lyric, perhaps in our language, certainly among Tennyson's work; but, when understood, it is rich in ethical purpose; it is, as drama should be, a purging of passion by means of pity and fear. And it is well-nigh incredible how anyone could overlook the point to which all is directed. As the guns sounded far away in the Black Sea, and the horrible scourge of war swept his people and the society against which he had railed, the frantic youth reaches the noblest conclusion,

And myself have awaked, as it seems, to the better mind;  
It is better to fight for the good than to rail at the ill;  
I have felt for my native land, I am one with my kind,  
I embrace the purpose of God, and the doom assigned.

But the world appeared agreed to miss the point. Even such a friendly critic as Gladstone entirely misunderstood, though he afterwards had the nobility to recant his denunciation. The poet was assailed as a lover of war, who urged his country into it; he was charged with making a personal attack on John Bright, of whom he had not even thought. "Another wiseacre," he wrote in humorous protest, "accused me of calling Mr Layard an Assyrian Bull!" He was fond of quoting one letter which came to him on the publication of *Maud*: "Sir, I

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used to worship you, but now I hate you. I loathe and detest you. You beast! So you've taken to imitating Longfellow. Yours in aversion . . ." Even his own aunt, Mrs Russell, accused him of making an attack on coal-mine owners in the poem. "I really could find in my heart," he replies, "to be offended with such an imputation, for what must you think of me if you think me capable of such gratuitous and unmeaning personality and hostility? I am as sensitive a person as exists, and sooner than wound anyone in such a spiteful fashion, would consent never to write a line again; yea, to have my hand cut off at the wrist. . . . Now see, you the kindest and tenderest of human beings, how you have wronged me, and cherished in your heart this accusation as baseless, no, more baseless than a dream, for dreams have some better foundation in past things: but pray put it all out of your head."

It is only the noblest heart which can thus gaze into the misunderstandings, the malice, the spite, of his fellowmen without being soured, and without surrendering his love for men. It is impossible to find any trace of bitterness in this sensitive soul at treatment which was at once stupid and unjust. He had tried to point out the evils of the time in a dramatic way, and he had illustrated with extraordinary versatility his great theme, that selfishness

is the ruin of human life and unselfishness the essence of virtue; and he was at once accused of all the evils he exposed, while the good he commended was overlooked. His only consolation for the moment was that the poem was thoroughly understood and appreciated by such competent judges as Henry Taylor, Jowett, and the Brownings.

The two much-abused poems *The Ode on the Duke of Wellington* and *Maud* were his favourites when he was asked to read from his own works. He playfully said that he loved poor little Maud, as a parent loves a child that the world dislikes. But there was something more than that; the poet had great gifts as a reader and an actor, and no poem affords such scope for intonation, for changes of voice and manner, or for the utterance of the deepest and tenderest human passions. He would never read *In Memoriam*. The grief for his old friend was always too fresh. "It breaks me down, I cannot," he would say. But in *Maud* he had uttered all his range of feeling for that other and even dearer friend who was by his side; and he was well pleased in this dramatic way to relieve his full heart. As he came to the song, "Come into the garden, Maud," his eyes would flash, and the emotion in his voice would deepen to the last words of the stanza:

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She is coming, my own, my sweet,  
Were it ever so airy a tread,  
My heart would hear her and beat,  
Were it earth in an earthy bed ;  
My dust would hear her and beat,  
Had I lain for a century dead ;  
Would start and tremble under her feet,  
And blossom in purple and red.

Not only was the charge of Chauvinism misplaced—for he was a profound lover of peace ; but there is something peculiarly pathetic in these vigorous attacks upon one who stands almost alone in the ranks of great writers for his unfailing courtesy and appreciation in his relation with other poets. “ Many thanks for (Matthew) Arnold,” he writes to Dean Bradley ; “ nobody can deny that he is a poet. ‘ The Merman ’ was an old favourite of mine, and I like him as well as ever. ‘ The Scholar Gipsy ’ is quite new to me, and I have already an affection for him which I think will increase. There are several others which seem very good, so that altogether I may say you have conferred a great boon on me.” Of Wordsworth he said once to Palgrave : “ He seems to have been always before one in observation of nature.” He was the warm friend and encourager of Jean Ingelow. And to Swinburne, on the publication of *Atalanta*, he wrote : “ Altogether it is many a long day since I have read anything so fine, for it is not only carefully written, but it has both strength and splendour, and shows

moreover that you have a fine metrical invention which I envy you." And not only was he generous to what might seem to be rivals, but he had the kindest consideration for aspirants to literary honours. "I should by no means recommend you," he writes to one, a stranger, "to risk the publication of a volume on your own account. The publication of verse is almost always attended with loss. As an amusement to yourself and your friends the writing it is all very well. Accept my good wishes. . . ."

It is easy for one who is not a poet to offer an impartial appreciation to many writers; but for a poet to genuinely admire the work of his contemporaries, who must be his rivals, is far more difficult. And when one is free from jealousy or envy, and able to recognize qualities which he feels cast his own into the shade, it must be set to the account of a great nobility of character. It reflects an equal credit on Tennyson and Browning that they had such a hearty admiration for each other's works; for while Tennyson might have withheld praise from work which from his point of view would be formless and unpolished, Browning might well have been jealous of the splendid fame which, with work perhaps intrinsically inferior to his own, entirely eclipsed his slowly growing reputation; and yet Browning was delighted with the melody and the felicity of

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his friend, while Tennyson was quick to recognize the strength of thought and invention in the other. "He has a mighty intellect," he said.

It is evident, however, that the savage reception of *Maud* did not cloud his spirit. We find him in January 1856 at Lord Ashburton's with the Carlyles, Brookfields, Goldwin Smith, Spedding; and Brookfield, that old Cambridge friend who was always the humorist in every company, declares he "has been most cheerful and the life of the party." Yet, as always, his heart hankered for home. "It seems a house not uneasy to live in, only I regret my little fumitory at Farringford."

And now there came a great new interest into life in the friendship of the Queen and of Prince Albert. The Prince called one morning quite informally while the books were being sorted and all was in confusion, but he was very cordial, and his strong, self-sacrificing nature won the poet's affection. The poems which were now in process of creation, the *Idylls of the King*, seem in some subtle way to be connected with the Prince. The blameless king of the old story was in a manner reproduced before the poet's eyes. And the Prince on his part was not unconscious of some personal relation between the poems and himself. He wrote asking Tennyson to put his name in his copy of the *Idylls*, and said: "You would thus add a peculiar interest to the

book, from the perusal of which I derived the greatest enjoyment. They quite rekindle the feeling with which the legends of King Arthur must have inspired the chivalry of old, whilst the graceful form in which they are presented blends those feelings with the softer tone of our present age." Tennyson was incapable of the sycophancy which is supposed to be welcome at courts; but he was full of reverence for human worth, and his hearty admiration for the Prince and for his Royal wife was just of the kind which he felt for all good and noble people. He was always angry with "the want of reverence for great men, whose brightness, like that of the luminous bodies in heaven, makes the dark places look the darker." To Prince Albert, therefore, he gave not the flattery of a courtier, but the admiration of a man. And when the stroke of death removed him in 1861, and Princess Alice expressed a wish that Tennyson should in some way "idealise" the Prince, the poet replied that he did not well see how he should idealise a life which was in itself an ideal. But he wrote, as a dedication of the *Idylls of the King*, the lines which are the Prince's noblest memorial, and felt by all to be true and worthy of him,

These to his Memory—since he held them dear,  
Perchance as finding there unconsciously  
Some image of himself—I dedicate,  
I dedicate, I consecrate with tears—

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These Idylls. And indeed he seems to me  
Scarce other than my king's ideal knight,  
Who revered his conscience as his king,  
Whose glory was redressing human wrong,  
Who spake no slander, no, nor listened to it,  
Who loved one only, and who clave to her.

Nothing better elicits the real character than intercourse with persons of high station. Many a man has seemed independent, manly, and honest until that test has come, and has then proved to be a sycophant, and even worse. But this severe test,

In that fierce light which beats upon a throne  
And blackens every blot,

brought out in Tennyson nothing but his own firm undazzled spirit, and that human heart, his best possession, which could console a widow though a queen, and could serenely and respectfully contemplate the humanity which underlay the state, treating princes and princesses as men and women.

In 1857 the Indian Mutiny stirred the poet to the very depths; nothing perhaps ever touched the heroic part of the man more than the events of those dark months. *The Defence of Lucknow* will be remembered as long as Englishmen have to defend their empire against implacable assailants in any part of the world. And it was deeply significant that in the dead period at the end of the century, when the heart of England, deeply



stirred, wished to celebrate the relief of Ladysmith, Kimberley or Mafeking, it turned tenderly back to those stirring lines which never lose their power,

Saved by the valour of Havelock, saved by the blessing of  
Heaven!

'Hold it for fifteen days,' we have held it for eighty-  
seven!

And ever aloft on the palace roof the old banner of England  
flew.

It was Tennyson's power—and he has had no successor—that in all national crises he could express the best and purest feeling of the English people. The base and sordid elements which must exist in a great commercial community he had the art of quietly ignoring; and the nation found utterance for the thought of its best self. This power could never have been maintained except by one who eschewed the corrupted currents of the world, and lived habitually in the upper air of the national life.

A small episode at this time beautifully illustrates how, from the heart of his own tranquil home and sheltered felicity, he was able to reach and to help men of the most various kinds. While one morning came a letter from a man who had been deterred from suicide by reading *The Two Voices*, another morning came a breezy letter from Lord Dufferin with a copy of *Letters from High Latitudes*. The

writer confessed that he had not been a lover of poetry. The charms of Dryden, Pope, Young, Byron, Cowper, even when read by his beloved mother, had been lost on him. But "I fell in with a volume of yours and suddenly felt such a sensation of delight as I never experienced before. A new world seemed open to me, and from that day, by a constant study of your works, I gradually worked my way to a thorough appreciation of what is good in all kinds of authors."

Some time after Lord Dufferin asked the poet if he would write an inscription for a tower which he had built on his estate in memory of his mother, whose name was Helen. The response to this request was a little poem which sheds a flood of light on the character and habitual feeling of the writer.

Helen's tower, here I stand,  
 Dominant over sea and land,  
 Son's love built me and I hold  
 Mother's love engraven in gold.  
 Love is in and out of time,  
 I am mortal stone and lime.  
 Would my granite girth were strong  
 As either love to last as long !  
 I should wear my crown entire  
 To and through the Doomsday fire,  
 And be proud of angels' eyes  
 In some recurring Paradise.

"Love is in and out of time"—that is Tennyson through and through. This was his religion ; this

was his message to his age and all ages. It was this that bound him to such a teacher as Robertson whom he considered the most spiritual of all the preachers of the century, and to such a man as Maurice whom he welcomed down to Farringdon in a delicious poem, asking him to come and discuss matters "dear to the man that is dear to God."

How best to help the slender store,  
 How mend the dwellings of the poor ;  
 How gain in life, as life advances,  
 Valour and charity more and more.

When Maurice took the family prayers, Mrs Tennyson entered in her journal, "A. rejoiced as much as I did in his reading, the most earnest and holiest reading, A. said, he had ever heard."

In the summer of 1859, now just fifty years old, he visited Portugal and was greatly amused by an enthusiastic duke who had fought under Wellington, been in forty-two combats, successful in all, and married two English wives, both perfect women. He seized Tennyson's hands and said, "Who does not know England's Poet Laureate? I am the Duke of Saldanha." The tour was not a success, "Yet," he wrote to the Duke of Argyll, "Cintra is not without its beauties, being a mountain of green pines rising out of an everywhere arid and tawny country, with a fantastic Moorish-looking castle on the peak, which

commands a great sweep of the Atlantic and the mouth of the Tagus : here on the topmost tower sat the king (they say) day by day in the old times of Vasco da Gama, watching for his return, till he saw him enter the river : there perhaps was a moment worth having been waited for."

Curiously enough this letter contains a reference to Macaulay's suggestion that Tennyson should write on the Sangreal. "It would be," says the poet, "too much like playing with sacred things. The old writers *believed* in the Sangreal. Many years ago I did write "Lancelot's Quest of the Grail" in as good verses as I ever wrote, no, I did not write, I made it in my head, and it has now altogether slipt out of memory."

But this thought, dismissed from his mind, was to recur. A great subject which was not to be playing with sacred things, but giving to old sanctities a new sanctity from the new time, was coming to him out of the West. He was not unlike the old Portuguese king waiting for Vasco ; and as the poet and his subject met, there was "a moment worth having been waited for." Meanwhile the summer tour ended with a visit to Cambridge : "spending the evening with my old tobacconist in whose house I used to lodge." And in November he obtained and read with intense interest an early copy of Darwin's *Origin of Species*, a book in which all his thought had prepared him to

find not the shattering, but the strengthening, of faith ;  
and he recast to satisfy his friend Thackeray who  
was now the exigent editor of *Cornhill*, an old poem,  
*Tithonus*, that voice from—

The ever silent spaces of the East,  
Far folded mists, and gleaming halls of morn.

## Chapter VI

# The Idylls of the King—Enoch

Arden, 1862-1872

“ Then, with a melody  
Stronger and statelier  
Led me at length  
To the city and palace  
Of Arthur the King ;  
Touched at the golden  
Cross of the churches,  
Flashed on the Tournament,  
Flickered and bickered  
From helmet to helmet,  
And last on the forehead  
Of Arthur the blameless  
Rested the Gleam.”

WORDSWORTH intended *The Excursion* to be the great structure of his life, a nave, to which the rest of his poems should be aisles, transepts and side chapels. The great work remained only a fragment, a fragment like the Cathedral of Siena, complete in itself, and yet but part of a greater design. The *Idylls of the King* occupy a similar position in the work of Tennyson, with this difference, that the poem was carried to its legitimate completion in twelve books.

Some of the great poets have been permitted to live by the work which they regarded as their masterpiece, Dante by the *Divina Comedia*, Spenser by *The Fairy Queen*, Milton by the *Paradise Lost*. But it was not given to Wordsworth or to Tennyson to achieve such a purpose. Many lovers of Wordsworth confess their enthusiasm cooled by *The Excursion*. On the other hand no work of Tennyson's was received with such universal applause as the *Idylls*, and many lovers of the poet believe that in this great poem his faculties are shown at their best ; but there are few critics who think that he will be known by the *Idylls* as Spenser is known by the *Fairy Queen*.

Our purpose just now, however, is not to estimate the permanent poetic value of this poem, or, to speak more correctly, cycle of poems, but to observe what light they, as the main work of a life-time, shed upon the life. Whether it is the greatest of the poet's works or not, only time can decide, but we can at once recognise, in the light of the *Memoir*, that it was the most biographical. Though there is no direct personal reference in it, it is throughout the record of the poet's ideals, purposes, hopes, aspirations, despondencies. In a word, it is a transcript of Tennyson's religion, and very largely a reflection of his life. The King is the ideal by which the poet's own life was shaped ; his own work in the world was, in his own eyes, the same as Arthur's ; probably,

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in his intense humility he felt that his efforts ended in a weird battle in the West, like the King's, and there could be no doubt that his Passing was a return to the great deep of the Divine Love and Purpose from which he came. We must pause therefore more deliberately over the *Idylls* than it has been necessary to do over the previous poems; we must note their origin and development, their burden and purpose, the conclusion which they seem to reach. We are looking on Tennyson's life in his own magic mirror.

"The vision of Arthur as I have drawn him," said the poet, "had come upon me when, little more than a boy, I first lighted upon Malory." Then "at twenty-four I meant to write an epic or a drama of King Arthur, and I thought that I should take twenty years about the work." It was the theme that Milton had once resolved as a subject for his epic; but fortunately had resigned in favour of one more universal. To Tennyson it came burdened with the romance of many ages, and it was more suitable for his genius, on account of its picturesqueness and chivalrous trappings, than a shadowy mystery like the Fall, or the awful distinctions of Hell and Purgatory and Heaven as they came to Dante's vision. From early days he made prose notes such as this: "Arthur lived about 500 A.D., and defeated his enemies in a pitched battle in the little kingdom of Strathclyde; and the earliest allusions to him are



to be found in the Welsh bards of the seventh century. In the twelfth century Geoffrey of Monmouth collected the legends about him as an European conqueror in his *History of the Britons*, and translated them from Celtic into Latin. The *Morte d'Arthur*, by Thomas Malory, was printed by Caxton in 1485." That the story in its romantic aspects was always at work in the poet's mind, is clear from *The Lady of Shalott*, which appeared in its first form in the volume of 1832. Already in this exquisite lyric, which remains one of the most musical and entrancing that he ever wrote, he introduced Launcelot and Camelot, and the world had the first vision of the enchanted realm which was forming in the young man's fancy. In the volume of 1842 came *Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere*, *Sir Galahad*, and, most important of all, *Morte d'Arthur*, which was afterwards incorporated in the finished poem, *The Passing of Arthur*. He had made a poem in his head on Launcelot's quest of the San Graal, "in as good verse as ever I wrote." But at last in 1855 the epic rose in his imagination, though he shrank from the use of the term epic, and adapted the more modest word *Idyll* to express his judgment on his work. After four years of thought, in 1859, *Enid*, *Vivien*, *Elaine*, and *Guinevere*, were ready and published.

Now before noting the reception which was accorded to this first instalment of the epic of Arthur,

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and before tracing the steps of its completion, we must try to see the meaning or the purpose of the whole.

As the poems appeared without comment or explanation, the world was content to accept the charming stories, the lovely modulations of the verse, the pictures, gorgeous as Turnerian water-colours, and the general impression of what Spenser would have called a world of Faerie, without troubling to consider whether there was any ultimate purpose beyond the expression of beauty, or any lesson except that which consummate Art for Art's sake teaches. It was only later that readers began to see a moral purpose, and to surmise an allegory. Now we have the poet's own authority for recognising the moral purpose, and his partial confession of an allegory. But the allegory is far from avowed. In the *Fairy Queen*, which is the closest parallel to the *Idylls of the King* in earlier literature, the allegory was declared in the names of the personages; and though readers frequently disregard it and are content with the sustained sweetness of the verse, the great poet, the forerunner of Puritanism, would have felt the allegorical teaching to be of the essence of the poem. Tennyson would have repudiated any strict allegorical intention; but he admitted that he was speaking in parables. "The whole," he said, "is the dream of man coming into practical

life and ruined by one sin. Birth is a mystery and death is a mystery, and in the midst lies the tableland of life, and its struggles and performances. It is not the history of one man or of one generation, but of a whole cycle of generations." Here then it is admitted that we have a "criticism of life," as Matthew Arnold would have said. We are justified in finding here what the poet conceives to be the purport of a human life in this or in any epoch. "Poetry is truer than fact," he used to say, and here is the truth of life. Man issues out of the infinite, tossed up on the shore of time; he is received by Merlin, who embodies reason; and with the sword Excalibur, he must do battle with the indifference, the materialism, the sensuality, which constitute the innate heathendom of the world. In this conflict the soul only lives and vanquishes by virtue of the vision in the heavens, and that vision is embodied in the Word who, according to *In Memoriam*, "wrought with human hands the creed of creeds." Arthur is from first to last a follower of Christ, and walks laboriously "in His steps." As Jowett, one of the shrewdest critics of human life that our time produced, wrote in 1893: "Tennyson has made the Arthur legend a great revelation of human experience, and of the thoughts of many hearts." And be it observed, he has made it a Christian revelation. The quaint medieval dress is not accidentally

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Christian; the accident may pass, but it will be found that the Christianity is of the essence. The meaning of life for man in this epoch is to bring Christ into the real working world, to see him, like Galahad or Percival, in vision, if so the faculty comes; but above all, to realise Him, like Arthur in practice, in the government of self and of the world.

Grasping the central thought of the poem, each reader may work out the details as the time requires—this is Tennyson's own idea—and we should err in giving any dogmatic interpretation of the general movement of the poem. But the broad clue is this: Guinevere the queen is unfaithful to Arthur her Lord. Launcelot loves her, and she allows it. This illicit amour, though hidden for a time under the veil of decorum, poisons the court, and ruins the heroic Table Round of Knights. The epic is like the *Paradise Lost*, the story of sin entering into the world with all its woe. And unlike Dante, the poet does not work from the Inferno to Paradiso, but from an earthly paradise, to an earthly hell. The profound melancholy which with Tennyson was constitutional, and perhaps we may add the intellectual unrest of the time in which he lived, determined this reversal of the spiritual order, and left the finished poem a greater wreck than Wordsworth's unfinished *Excursion*.

The sin of the Queen brings discouragement and despair to honest souls, and gives occasion for the triumph of Vivien the harlot over Merlin, and of Mordred, the embodiment of disorder, over the King's government. In the spreading corruption the visionary pursuit of the Holy Grail is introduced as that which professes to save but actually ruins the kingdom. The monkish or ascetic idea of religion is the worldly way of redressing a disordered world, but it makes the disorder complete, by drawing aside the knights that should be labouring for men to the selfish indulgence of spiritual excitement. A pure soul like Sir Galahad here and there may find his account in the life of ecstasy and vision; but the strong man and true, the King, has his solid work to do in the world, and for him to leave the work to follow visions would be to chase the will o' the wisps across the quagmire.

In *Gareth and Lynette* the joy of goodness leads to victory. In *Pelleas and Ettarre* the corruption is open and rank. Tristram and Iseult appear here as the shameless reflection of the shame-faced Launcelot and Guinevere. In *Balin and Balan* the ruin strikes through honest souls and ends in fratricide. And at length in *The Last Tournament* we have the picture of the cynical disillusioned society which is the outcome of that initial sin. Dr Stopford Brooke considers that the allegorical motive is

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overdone in the later *Idylls*; the office of the preacher clashes with that of the poet; and the two suffer. But perhaps the fault does not lie in the preacher's obvious earnestness. In this respect Tennyson is not more earnest or more avowed than Dante or Spenser or Milton. But where the failure overtakes him—and it is a sorrowful insight into that valorous and passionate inner life—is here, that he had not at the time won through to any clear vision of the truth of life. He wrote in the tumult of the inward conflict, and not in the tranquillity of victory. *In Memoriam* was agony issuing in peace; the later poems were written, as it were, in the Land of Beulah before crossing the river. But the *Idylls* come in those middle years of life when the noblest minds are often involved in doubt, and the issue of the conflict appears questionable and obscure. The artist's hand never failed; the music was richer than ever; the moralist's insight never failed; the noble burden as of some ancient prophet, was faithfully delivered — woe, woe to the man or the land that dallies with sin, or suffers the pure ideals of service and unselfishness to be sullied; the Christian motive never failed; never did the poet sing more truly of the power of faith and love and prayer, or flood more triumphantly this dark uncertainty of life with the light of immortality; charity never failed; the guilty Guinevere is mag-

nanimously forgiven, and the guilty Launcelot repents and enters into a life, purged and redemptive; but what failed, for the moment, and unhappily for the critical moment, was the clear and buoyant vision of ultimate victory. A palsy falls on life; the gay spring passes through summer bloom to the bitter winter nights beside the dismal mere; everything is wilted and wan, the vision fades, and the troubled spirit of man finds dumb resignation, and not achievement, his final good. Here is purgatory and hell, but heaven has faded away. Here is Paradise Lost but no Paradise Regained.

But this which plants the seed of mortality in the Poem is just what endears the writer to us. The sadness of soul, which intrinsically is reflected in the whole course of the *Idylls*, tells a tale which must always touch our hearts. His own purpose was strenuous and high; and outwardly, at least, the world's richest rewards seemed laid at the writer's feet; but there was the inward travail and gloom which is the lot of the loftiest spirits in this world. This man also had his thorn in the flesh; he had to wrestle with the dismal phantoms of the spirit. If he kept faith and a sound conscience it was only by fighting desperately for them, and he held them rather in the gloom of the struggle than in the light of the victory. Gethsemane and Calvary bind the hearts of men to Christ more than the sunny

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days of popularity about the Sea of Galilee. They who are to conquer the hearts of men must suffer much. As Rothe puts it, men are God's commoners, but sufferers His nobles. And thus the *Idylls of the King*, the record of a grimmer suffering than *In Memoriam*, may bind us with closer ties to that strong, reticent, and agonising heart.

The reception of the first four *Idylls* was literally an ovation. The faithful wife records the work done in the summer-house looking over the down to the sea; she finds the parting of Arthur and Guinevere "awe inspiring." Kingsley came down for a visit to Farringford, and declared that he liked the *Idylls* only less than *In Memoriam*. Ten thousand copies were sold in the first week of publication. The "indolent reviewers" applauded, especially the *Spectator*, the *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly*, though the writer in the last was not exactly an "indolent reviewer," it was the busiest statesman of the century, Mr Gladstone. A few months after publication came a wonderful letter from Thackeray which might console even the most despondent writer, though Tennyson says in his reply "your boundlessness of approval made me in a measure shamefaced. I could scarcely accept it, being, I fancy, a modest man, and always more or less doubtful of my own efforts in any line." Yet never was any recognition more obviously sincere: "My dear old Alfred, I owe



you a letter of happiness and thanks. Sir, about three weeks ago, when I was ill in bed, I read the *Idylls of the King*, and I thought 'Oh I must write to him now, for this pleasure, this delight, this splendour of happiness which I have been enjoying. . . .'

"Arthur in gold armour, and Guinevere in gold hair, and all those knights and heroes, and beauties, and purple landscapes and misty grey lakes in which you have made me live . . . seem like facts to me, since about three weeks ago, when I read the book. . . . You have made me as happy as I was as a child with the *Arabian Nights*, every step I have walked in Elfland has been a sort of Paradise to me . . . what could I do but be grateful to that surprising genius which has made me so happy? Do you understand that what I mean is all true and that I should break out were you sitting opposite with a pipe in your mouth! Gold and purple and diamonds, I say, gentlemen and glory and love and honour, and if you haven't given me all these why should I be in such an ardour of gratitude! But I have had out of that dear book the greatest delight that has ever come to me since I was a young man; to write and think about it makes me almost young, and this I suppose is what I'm doing like an after-dinner speech. P.S.—I thought the *Grandmother* quite as fine. How can you at fifty be doing things as well as at thirty-five?"

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“I think my prediction is coming true,” wrote the Duke of Argyll a few weeks before, “that your *Idylls of the King* will be understood and admired by many who are incapable of understanding and appreciating many of your other works. Macaulay is not a man incapable of *understanding* anything, but I know that his tastes in poetry were so formed in another line that I consider him a good test, and three days ago I gave him *Guinevere*. The result has been as I expected, that he has been *delighted with it*. He told me he had been greatly moved by it and admired it exceedingly. Although by practice and disposition he is eminently a critic, he did not find one single fault.” And a few days later, “The applause of the *Idylls* goes on crescendo, and so far as I can hear without exception. Detractors are silenced. Macaulay has repeated to me several times an expression of his great admiration. Another well-known author, himself a poet, whom I shall not name, who heretofore could go no further than a half-unwilling approval of *The Lotos Eaters*, has succumbed to the *Idylls*, has laid down his arms without reserve. I consider him a test and index of a large class of minds. I have heard of several other obdurate sinners who have been converted from the error of their ways.” At the end of the year a letter came from Kingsley. “I was amused to-night at an outburst of enthusiasm in your behalf from a most unenthusiastic

man (though a man of taste and scholarship), Walter the proprietor of the *Times*. He confessed to having been a disbeliever in you save in *Locksley Hall*, which he said was the finest modern lyric; but he considered you had taken liberties, and so forth. But the *Idylls* he confessed had beaten him. He thought them the finest modern poem."

"The first time I ever heard the *Idylls of the King*," wrote the eldest daughter of the Queen in 1862, "was last year, when I found both the Queen and Prince in raptures about them. The first bit I ever heard was the end of *Guinevere*, the last two or three pages; the Prince read them to me, and I shall never forget the impression it made upon me hearing those grand and simple words in his voice! He did so admire them, and I cannot separate the idea of King Arthur from the image of him whom I most revered on earth."

But probably no approbation from critics, or even from the Throne, was more welcome, or deserved to be, than the beautiful letter from his mother, who was now living at Rosemount, Well Walk, Hampstead. The letter is dated January 10, 1860, and it says: "Dearest Ally, I received a nice kind note from Alan Ker a short time since, which I now enclose, thinking it will give thee pleasure to know what he says about thy last beautiful and interesting poems. It does indeed (as he supposes it would)

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give me the purest satisfaction to notice that a spirit of Christianity is perceptible through the whole volume. It gladdens my heart also to perceive that Alan seems to estimate it greatly on that account. O dearest Ally, how fervently have I prayed for years that our merciful Redeemer would intercede with our Heavenly Father, to grant thee His Holy Spirit, to urge thee to employ the talents He has given thee, by taking every opportunity to impress the precepts of His Holy Word on the minds of others. My beloved son, words are too feeble to express the joy of my heart in perceiving that thou art earnestly endeavouring to do so. Dearest Ally, there is nothing for a moment to be compared to the favour of God: I need not ask thee if thou art of the same opinion. Thy writings are a convincive proof that thou art. My beloved child, when our Heavenly Father summons us hence, may we meet, and all that are dear to us, in that blessed state where sorrow is unknown, never more to be separated. I hope Emmy and thyself continue well, also the dear little boys. All here join me in kindest love to both.—Ever, dearest Ally, thy attached and loving mother,  
E. Tennyson.”

Perhaps she was quickest to observe the Christian verities in her son's work, because she herself had most to do with planting them in his heart.

Thus the chorus of praise was without a discord ;

and even Ruskin, who with singular shrewdness saw the one weakness of the subject, yet joined in the general admiration and gratitude: "*In Memoriam, Maud, The Miller's Daughter*, and such like will always be my own pet rhymes, yet I am quite prepared to admit this to be as good as any, for its own peculiar audience. Treasures of wisdom there are in it, and word-painting such as never was yet for concentration, nevertheless it seems to me that so great power ought not to be spent on visions of things past but on the living present. For one hearer capable of feeling the depth of this poem I believe ten would feel a depth quite as great if the stream flowed through things nearer the hearer." This forecast was curiously realised by the publication of *Enoch Arden*, and it is possible that Ruskin's judgment influenced the poet in his choice of subjects for that and later volumes.

But whatever work might be attempted between whiles, the epic of Arthur was to be carried through to completion. At first he hesitated to deal with the subject which was to form the most remarkable of the *Idylls*. "As to Macaulay's suggestion of the Sangreal," he had written, "I doubt whether such a subject could be handled in these days without incurring a charge of irreverence. It would be too much like playing with sacred things. The old writers *believed* in the Sangreal"; and next year, "as I gave up the subject so many long years ago, I do not think that I shall

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resume it." But the subject would not get dismissed so summarily. It constantly recurred; and in 1868 we find him in his Maiden's Croft with all its medieval associations, working as under inspiration, at this visionary theme. On September 9th, his wife enters in her diary: "A. read me a bit of his *San Graal* which he has now begun," and on September 11th, "he read me more of the *San Graal*, very fine." On May 18th, 1869 she enters, "A. read the *San Graal*. I doubt whether it would have been written but for my endeavour, and the Queen's wish and that of the Crown Princess. Thank God for it. He has had the subject on his mind for years, ever since he began to write about Arthur and his knights." By the end of the year the new *Idyll* was published. His whole soul was in it. He liked to point out the difference between the five visions of the Grail, the Holy Nun's, Sir Galahad's, Sir Percivale's, Sir Lancelot's, Sir Bors', determined by their temperaments and their Christian development. It was all mystical, and the key was to be found in Percivale's vision and fall. It was all relevant to the nineteenth century. "The Holy Grail," he said, "is one of the most imaginative of my poems. I have expressed there my strong feeling as to the reality of the Unseen. The end, when the king speaks of his work and of his visions, is intended to be the summing up of all in the highest note by the highest of human men. These three

lines in Arthur's speech are the (spiritually) central lines of the *Idylls*,

In moments when he feels he cannot die,  
And knows himself no vision to himself,  
Nor the High God a vision.

And his purpose in thus bringing out the Divine reality was humorously expressed in the words: "The general English view of God is as of an immeasurable clergyman, and some mistake the devil for God." Maurice was quick to recognise the religious value of the poem. In sending a book of his own he wrote, "If I can persuade any who listened to me to seek for the Holy Grail and to increase the 'Arthur' standard of character above any Greek one, my aim will be accomplished, and I shall thankfully own how much more you have contributed to it than we lecturers or parsons can."

For the next two years the remaining *Idylls* were constantly on the stocks. On May 21, 1871, his wife enters, "He read me his *Tristram*, the plan of which he had been for some weeks discussing with me. Very grand and terrible." This appeared as *The Last Tournament* in December of that year. Already on November 19 we read in the same journal, "The new poem *Sir Gareth* which he has almost written down, is full of youth, vigour and beauty." He was extraordinarily happy as the great work drew to completion. In 1872 they were all

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—with the exception of *Balin and Balan*, which appeared in 1885 — published with the Epilogue to the Queen. Spedding admired the Epilogue almost more than anything in the poem ; and the old friend Fitzgerald, who professed to have “given up” Tennyson years ago, though he liked other things and especially the *Northern Farmer* more than the *Idylls*, was generous in approbation : “I feel how pure, noble and holy your work is, and whole phrases, lines and sentences of it will abide with me, and I am sure, with men after me.”

The poet seemed to have silenced criticism and conquered time. It may be even doubted whether any poet in the history of the world had been so unanimously and enthusiastically crowned with the bays. Such an acclamation may not be propitious for poetic immortality ; but it affords a magnificent test of character, and we have now to turn aside and observe him during these years when his name was on all lips, and when America was as enthusiastic as the old country, every post bringing him recognition, honour, and almost adoration.

It is just at this time that we have his estimate of fame. Speaking once of Alexander Smith he said : “He has plenty of promise but he must learn a different creed from that he preaches in those lines beginning—

‘Fame, fame, thou art next to God.’



Next to God! next to the Devil, say I. Fame might be worth having if it helped us to do good to a single mortal, but what is it? only the pleasure of hearing oneself talked of up and down the street." "Modern fame is nothing," he said once to Barnes, the Dorsetshire poet, "I'd rather have an acre of land. I shall go down, down. I'm up now. Action and reaction." Frederick Locker remembered him saying that as a boy he had a great thirst to be a poet, and a *popular* poet. He would rove through the fields composing hundreds of couplets and shouting them to the sky; but that now he was inclined to think popularity a bastard fame, which sometimes goes with the more real thing but is independent of and somewhat antagonistic to it. He appeared to shrink from his own popularity, and maintained that the artist should spare no pains, but should do his very best for the sake of his art and for *that* only. His request for his art, and indeed for his whole life, was, as he put it,

Give her the wages of going on and not to die.

So far from being affected by his popularity, he seemed at this time to turn more earnestly than ever to his laborious studies of all things in heaven and earth, to be more delightful and loveable in his family and among his friends, and to reach out his sympathies more systematically to all that were in any way afflicted or distressed.

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“His moods are so variable,” wrote a guest in 1860, “his conversation so earnest, his knowledge of all things he writes about is so wide and minute, it is a rare treat to be in his domestic circle, where he talks freely and brightly without shyness.” To the same friend he said, when she and her husband left: “You are going away—it is taking away a bit of my sunshine—all that sounds like flattery; there is no need for us to make fine speeches. By this time you know I never do, and it is just a plain truth that your going takes away some of my sunshine.” Guests were numerous, and all seemed eager to come and sorry to go, Woolner, Palgrave, Holman Hunt, Val Prinsep, or Queen Emma from the Southern Seas, or the young Abyssinian prince, when Magdala was taken, or Longfellow from America, or Garibaldi, with the glory of the liberator on his brow. To all he was courtesy itself; and showed none of the brusqueness which he affected to strangers in self-protection. He hated fuss and flattery; but everyone who would be human and simple was welcome. We get some idea of the strenuous work which he maintained from the fact that in his Welsh holidays he learned Welsh, and was able to quote a Welsh proverb. His Italian was so good that he could quote Manzoni and other Italian poets with Garibaldi. With his passionate love of liberty his whole heart went out to Poland

or to Italy, and no vignette in the poet's life is more beautiful than that visit of Garibaldi's to Farringford which Henry Taylor put into verse :

And there was he, that gentle hero, who  
By virtue and the strength of his right arm,  
Dethroned an unjust king, and then withdrew  
To tend his farm.  
To whom came forth a mighty man of song,  
Whose deep-mouthed music rolls thro' all the land,  
Voices of many rivers, rich or strong,  
Or sweet or grand.

But the most surprising evidence of his intellectual activity at this period was that he, a man over fifty, set to work vigorously to master Hebrew. It had been suggested to him that he should attempt a metrical version of Job, and he determined to know the original. But he got enthusiastic about the language for its own sake. Thus his wife enters in her journal on Dec. 1, 1867 : " A. is reading Hebrew, *Job*, and the *Song of Solomon*, and *Genesis* : he talked much about his Hebrew, and about all-pervading Spirit being more understandable by him than solid matter." One day he asked Jowett, who was staying at Farringford, to give him a literal translation of a verse in Job. " But I can't read Hebrew," faltered the Master. " What ! " he exclaimed. " You the priest of a religion, and can't read your own sacred books ! " And we gather that it was not only the Old Testament which he read in the original. An

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entry in the wife's journal for Oct. 6, 1865, is: "A. read me some Lucretius, and the 1st Epistle of St Peter." Indeed, beyond the limits of his own art, he was a deep thinker on theological questions, and Bishop Colenso was right in thinking him "the man who was doing more than any other to frame the Church of the future." Certainly it is astonishing to find him in 1868 forming so correct a notion of the Song of Solomon, which at that time was understood by very few even of professed theologians. "Most people knew nothing about it," he said, "in the coarsely painted, misrepresented, ununderstandable story given in the Bible translation. There is hardly a trace of the most perfect idyl of the faithful love of a country girl for her shepherd, and of her resistance to the advances of a great king, that was ever written." His theology was an anticipation of the best thought of the thinkers of our own generation. For instance, in his charming explanation of Milton to his son, he remarked: "I hope most of us have a higher idea in these modern times of the Almighty than this:

'The will  
And high permission of all-ruling heaven  
Left him at large to his own dark designs,  
That with reiterated crimes he might  
Heap on himself damnation.'"

It is very remarkable that in the nineteenth century the greatest poets, Wordsworth, Tennyson, and

Browning, have all been essentially theologians ; and it is a curious commentary on the Comtian notion that the Theological stage comes first, to be replaced by the Metaphysical, which in its turn yields to the Positive. It seems to be one of the poet's functions to break new ground in the thought and apprehension of God, and to "ring in the Christ that is to be."

Some of the older theologians have suspected him of Pantheism ; but they have not noticed that it is the Higher Pantheism which he sings, according to the title of what his wife called "that Psalm-like poem." That Pantheism is best illustrated by a remark he once made to Frederick Locker, as they were gazing together on the High Alps. "Perhaps this earth," he said, "and all that is on it,—storms, mountains, cataracts, the sun and the skies,—are the Almighty ; in fact, such is our petty nature, we cannot see Him, but we see His shadow, as it were, a distorted shadow ; possibly at this moment there may be beings, invisible to us, who see the Almighty more clearly than we do. For instance, we have five senses ; if we had been born with only one our ideas of nature would have been very different from what they are." This, it will be noticed, is not Pantheism, but the Higher Pantheism. It does not say that the All (Pan) is God, but that the All is a shadow of God whom we are at present too imperfect to apprehend. And as the poem shows,

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Speak to Him thou, for He hears, and spirit with spirit  
can meet ;

it would be more correct to call this Pantheism of Tennyson's by the term Divine Immanence, the doctrine which it is the glory of the New Theology to insist on. The Transcendence of God, true as it is, removed Him to an infinite distance ; the Immanence brings Him near,—

Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands or feet.

But nothing more clearly defines his theological position at this time than his constant vindication of Christ. This was his answer to materialism and to rationalism: "They will not easily beat the character of our Lord, that union of man and woman, sweetness and strength." On one occasion in 1870 a lady was defending Shelley's views for the regeneration of mankind. "Shelley had not common sense!" he said. "Well, but had Christ common sense?" asked she. "Christ had more common sense than you or I, madam," was the reply. On another occasion, seven years earlier, Thomas Wilson spoke of Christ as an example of failure. "Do you call that failure," he cried, "which has altered the belief and the social relations of the whole world?" He was quite conscious of the difficulty of faith. "What a mystery is the Christian religion," he said to Locker; "it requires an act of

faith to believe and accept it"; but he knew how to exercise that faith, and he has taught many to recognise that there are two spheres of consciousness which are entered by different organs, faith and reason. The spiritual things which are the objects of faith are *ipso facto* not the objects of reason. "Faith must be our guide—that faith which we believe comes to us from a Divine source."

It is probably connected with his theological and biblical studies that at this time he drew near in his literary work to the heart of the people.

It may have been Ruskin's hint that turned his attention again to the simple life around, or it may have been the prompting of his own native sympathy. But it is very remarkable that just while he seemed filled with the Arthurian legend, visiting Cornwall and Brittany eager to find traces of his mythical hero; and just while he was coming into personal contact with the widowed Queen (who told him that next to the Bible *In Memoriam* was her comfort), or writing his Exhibition Ode, his mind was turning to the poor. "I am now about my fisherman (Enoch Arden) which is heroic too in its way." Just as Cambridge was offering him her honorary degree, he was occupied with that quaint humour of the simple folk in *The Northern Farmer*. This dialect poem was as convincing to the cultivated as to the farmers themselves. Fitzgerald wrote, "it

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drew tears to my eyes. I was got back to the substantial rough-spun nature I knew, and the old brute, invested by you with the solemn humour of humanity, like Shakespeare's *Shallow*, became a more pathetic phenomenon than the knights who revisit the world in your other verse." This un-failing touch with the common people is a striking trait in a man like Tennyson. His fastidious taste, his consummate culture, his classical models, were no excuse for a separation from his kind. He was specially happy when writing of his Old Fisherman, and he intended to call the Enoch Arden volume of 1864, *Idylls of the Hearth*. That volume sold with extraordinary rapidity. Sixty thousand copies were soon in circulation. To his great joy he began to be called the Poet of the People. He was delighted when he heard of the farmer in Holderness who exclaimed on hearing *The Northern Farmer* read, "Dang it, that caps owt. Now, sur, is that in print, because if it be I'll buy t' book, cost what it may." There is a significant entry in the wife's journal for Aug. 6, 1866. "A.'s birthday; we gave a dinner to the farm men." And another entry on Feb. 13, 1869, reveals the same extraordinary sympathy with the people. "A letter from Mr Gladstone in answer to one about our proposal for increasing the post-office percentage on the small deposits of the poor."

The fact is, an intense humility saved him from



being spoiled by the great and kept him in touch with the poor. When his boy Hallam was ill at Marlborough he said: "I have made up my mind to lose him; God will take him pure and good, straight from his mother's lessons. Surely it would be better for him than to grow up such a one as I am." And so when a Mr Tennyson of Chester called his son after him, he wrote: "I wish him a useful and happy career, and only hope that he will take a better model than his namesake to shape his life by. It is doubtless a pleasure to know that I have had sometimes the power to cheer the soldier, whose life of devotion to his country I honour; and few things in the world ought to gratify me so deeply as the assurance that anything I have written has had an influence for good." This profound humility made him rejoice when he heard that *Enoch Arden* had been regarded as a tract. The district visitor had read parts of the poem; when she offered the poor folk some tracts, an old woman said: "Thank you, ma'am, but I'd give all I had for that other beautiful tract which you read t'other day; it did me a power of good." The poet was "glad to have done any good to any one." And here is another entry from that photographic journal: "A. and I went to our ploughman to congratulate him on his having won the first ploughman's prize in the Isle of Wight. All the family radiant with the prize-money. The wife

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went off with it to buy winter shoes for her husband and the children."

Nor was the absorption in literature, in friends and in public affairs, an excuse for neglecting the nearest and dearest. Hallam was sent to Marlborough, but his father's conversation with him was itself an education. The supremacy of truth and courtesy to the poor were the foundations of it. In 1866 Lionel was taken to school at Hastings. "A. walked twice back along the road with him to comfort him at parting." He taught his boys to love the birds, took them to Selborne and climbed the Hanger with them. He read Scott and Æschylus and Virgil with them. In August 1871 he took Hallam alone with him on a Welsh tour. The devotion to the wife was not only that absorbing intellectual companionship which is revealed everywhere in her journal; but it included that chivalrous personal care which literary men, engrossed in work, and popular men flattered by the world, are apt to forget. This entry on Christmas Day, 1871, speaks volumes: "I was very unwell, and he said, 'I leave you to your two sons' nursing,' but he did not, and watched over me as tenderly and carefully as ever."

That tenderness which is only possible in strong natures was never permitted to grow callous. In February 1865 his beloved mother died at Rosemount. "The departure of so blessed a being," he wrote in his letter-diary, "almost whose last words

were, when asked how she felt, 'very quiet,' seems to have no sting in it, and she declared that she had no pain." But he felt it intensely, and three months later he wrote to Aubrey de Vere to comfort the bereaved family of his old friend, Stephen Spring Rice: "Death is, I should hope, to most of us a deliverance, and to him especially, suffering as he did continually from these attacks, it must have been a great one. I have had such dear and near losses this year that—I do not say that I can on that account sympathise more fully with his wife and children, but I do most fully feel for and with them. . . ." The wife added: "He was one of the five of his friends I knew before our marriage, and the third (the other two Arthur Hallam and Henry Lushington), who has left us. No new friends can be like the old to him or to any, I suppose, and few of the old were so dear to him as he. May I, too, say all that is kind and sympathizing." New friends cannot be just like the old; but new friends were also intensely dear. In 1870 his friend and neighbour in the Isle of Wight, Sir John Simeon, died. The warmth with which he wrote to the widow is extraordinary: "Of course nothing could be more grateful to me than some memorial of my much loved and ever honoured friend, the only man on earth, I verily believe, to whom I could, and have more than once opened my whole heart: and he

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also has given me in many a conversation at Farringford in my little attic his utter confidence. I knew none like him for tenderness and generosity, not to mention his other noble qualities, and he was the very Prince of Courtesy." His great faith in the future life made him a great comforter to the bereaved—that faith was the core of his being. "A. received Mr Jowett's four volumes of Plato," wrote his wife in February of next year, "a most welcome gift for itself and for the donor. I cut open the *Phædo* for him. He talked on the subjects nearest his heart, the Resurrection and the Immortality of the Soul." He often quoted Milton's great line :

Nor love thy life, nor hate ; but what thou livest  
Live well.

He never sorrowed as they who have no hope. He suffered, but was calm.

Thus the picture of the poet in the dazzling days of his great popularity gradually becomes clear to us, an earnest, toiling, humorous, sympathetic human being ; with a certain constitutional melancholy, but not given to tears. One who knew him well said that he only once saw tears in his eyes, and that was when reading Virgil's story of the burning of Troy in the Second *Æneid*, moved more by the majesty of the verse than by the catastrophe. A man of extraordinary knowledge and profundity of thought, so that when he spoke he gave an epitome of the

subjects, remarkable for direct, sincere speech, in the fewest and most nervous words possible. A man full of racy anecdotes, equally full of deep spiritual utterance. A man who says memorable things. A young girl staying in the house could never forget him taking her up to his study, talking delightfully while he finished his pipe, and telling her "never to get spoilt by the world"; and yet a man who never for a moment departs from an absolute humility, who never exaggerates his importance, or even thinks that his works are likely to live. His reply to one who sends him a flattering poem is: "I could wish that I had something of what Master Swinburne calls the Divine arrogance of genius, that I might take it into my system and rejoice abundantly; but as Marvell says:

‘At my back I always hear  
Time’s winged chariot hurrying near;  
And yonder all before us lie  
Deserts of vast eternity,’

where most of us will be left and swallowed up."

While everyone is thinking of him as the brilliant and successful writer crowned with immortality, and numbering him among the four or five greatest English poets, he, comparing himself and his work with eternity and the starry systems, thinks of himself humbly. His hope is not literary immor-

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tality, but personal immortality, resting on the nature of God, and on the revelation of Christ. He lives the simple, and on the whole joyful, Christian life, full of small kindnesses, such as pleas for poor literary men or other needy persons. He lives in his time and in the life of others. Nothing rejoices him more than the great Education Act of 1871; he admires Mr Forster's courage. "No education, no franchise," is his epigram. The spiritual is to him the real; consequently, class distinctions have no significance for him; he is equally at home with the Queen and with a Cornish fisherman. He is quite conscious of the heroic, and of the unheroic elements in each kind of human being. But he is quick to mark the heroic, and willing to pass by the unheroic. He, one of the hardest and fruitfulest workers that ever lived, seems to himself to be doing nothing. "I envy you your life," he says to Dean Bradley, "of hard, regular, useful, important work."

There is nothing feminine or mawkish in him, nothing vain or self-satisfied, nothing unjust or censorious. As the portrait completes itself before one's eyes, the qualities are not more striking than the absence of defects; he hardly seems to have the defects of his qualities. It would be thought for instance that one so sensitive and shy and treated so indulgently both at home and by the

world, would be an intolerable travelling companion. But quite the contrary. Frederick Locker spoke from experience, and declared that he endured good-humouredly irritating annoyances. "My many-sided travelling companion was a humorist." His humour was of the driest. "Did anybody ever make one laugh more heartily than Alfred Tennyson? He tells a story excellently and has a catching laugh. . . . Tennyson has an entirely natural and a very kindly laugh." One little scene completes the impression. Tennyson and Locker are returning from Paris: the former is not well, the latter is packing. Locker cleverly hoists Tennyson into his coat and bids him be easy. But the coat is tight and the traveller would prefer his larger and looser one. Locker, not wishing to unpack again, urges him: "Now be aisy, or if you can't be aisy, be as aisy as you can." The poet plaintively submits and smokes his pipe. When all is finished Locker finds that he has crushed Tennyson's great form into his own much smaller coat and packed both the poet's own. "At last when my blunder was set right and when all was comfortably arranged, the dear fellow volunteered something very kind about the trouble I took for him. I assured him it was no trouble, quite the contrary. He was silent for a while and then he said: Locker, I think you have a physical pleasure in packing."

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There is always something of the child in a man of genius; there must be much of the child in a good Christian. On both sides this man had much of the child-like in him. Shrewd and practical as he was, broad-shouldered and deep-chested and high browed as he appeared, on the whole the most striking feature was the large and simple directness of speech and thought, and the complete freedom from guile. If sometimes there was the sad wail of the infant crying in the night, the infant crying for the light; there was often the fresh enjoyment, the buoyant laughter, the sunlit freedom of the child.

It was, then, quite of a piece with his general conduct and character that now, in the height of his fame (1866), he forwarded a set of his books to the old schoolmaster of Louth, now in his eighty-sixth year. The time at Louth had been short and miserable, for no love was there. He owed nothing to the school, "but to love one another"; and this little deed of grace serves as an illustration of his whole attitude to life. The reply of the Rev. J. Waite might well have been kept as a treasure, a memorial of the little unremembered acts of kindness in which a good life consists: "I return you my best thanks for your immortal works forwarded to me by your bookseller, which I shall not fail to have placed on a shelf in the library of the new Grammar School in Louth, with the works of your two elder brothers, as



a contribution more precious than silver or gold, being really *Aurea Carmina*; in memory of the elementary part of your education received by all of you in that royal institution. Had I been asked in your boyish days which of the three would probably scale the highest summit of Parnassus, I almost fancy I should have awarded the palm to primogeniture, and I am still almost disposed to say :

Arcades *omnes*,  
Et cantare pares et respondere parati."

And now this interesting chapter in the life may fitly close with two contrasts, one with the dead Goethe, the other with the living Browning, a glimpse of Darwin and an echo of that high talk which made Farringford an object of desire for all the intellect of the time.

There is a deep spiritual pathos in the visit which Tennyson paid to Goethe's house in Weimar. Goethe had been the poet of the world; Tennyson was the poet of Two Worlds. Goethe had died with the cry "Open the windows that I may get more light"; Tennyson was to die, as it were, in the serenity of light.

"A. was touched by seeing the *Salve* on the mat," says the wife's journal, "and all Goethe's old boots at the entrance. . . . The Direktor made no remark, but when he had shown us the busts and gems and

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statuettes and Goethe's own drawings, he took us into the sacred study. One cannot explain in words the awe and sadness with which this low dark room filled A. The study is narrow and in proportion long. In the middle was a table with a cushion on it where Goethe would lean his arms, and a chair with a cushion where he sometimes sat, but his habit was to pace up and down and to dictate to his secretary. On one side of the room was a bookcase about two-thirds up the wall, with boxes for his manuscripts. There were also visiting-cards strung like bills together, and Goethe's old empty wine bottles, in which the wine had left patterns like frost patterns. On the other side of the room was a calendar of things that had struck him in the newspapers. Here a door opened to his bedroom, such a melancholy little place! By the bed was an armchair to which at last he used to move from his bed for a little change. All round the wall by the bed and the chair, a dark green leafy carpet or tapestry was fastened half-way up the wall of the room. On the washing-stand was some of the last medicine he took. The one window at the foot of the bed was partly boarded up. It looked I think into the garden."

*Nos mortalia tangunt*; but were the "awe and sadness" simply caused by the melancholy rooms, and the mournful relics of departed greatness, or was there something else which moved the living

in memory of the dead? There is something in this scene of that pensive melancholy with which Christianity regards Hellenism, the great Faith and the great Hope lingering wistfully over the Faith and Hope which after rejoicing in the upper sunshine plunge into the Shades? <sup>1</sup>

The relations of Tennyson with Browning were, as we have seen, of the most brotherly kind. Their message was one, and they were conscious of the camaraderie. The extraordinary difference in style and method did not prevent either from recognising his brother-in-arms. Tennyson spoke to his own generation, ravished their ears and gained their attention: Browning had his audience in the future; but each listened to the other with reverence and affection. "*Enoch* continues the perfect thing I thought it at first reading," thus Browning acknowledges the gift of the volume, with a wish that 'From A. T.' had been on the fly-leaf for his son's sake, "but the *Farmer*, taking me unawares, astonished me more in this stage of acquaintanceship. How such a poem disproves the statement in that strange mistake of yours, the *Flower-apologue*! 'Steal your seed!'

<sup>1</sup> Tennyson's admiration for Goethe was great. Some of his lyrics he considered incomparable, and it was to him that he referred in the rather ambiguous lines:

I hold it true with him who sings  
In one set harp with divers tones,  
That men may rise on stepping stones  
Of their dead selves to higher things.

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as if they want flower-seed in a gum-flower factory !  
. . . Good-bye and God bless you ! give my congratulations to Mrs Tennyson . . . Ever yours, on the various stations of this life's 'line,' and I hope in the final refreshment room ere we get each his cab and drive gaily off Home, where call upon

ROBERT BROWNING."

It is curious how exactly this was realised in the two final poems of the two poets, the Epilogue of *Asolando* and *Crossing the Bar*.

On the other hand, when Browning sent a volume of his, Tennyson replied: "Very welcome is the nosegay, not only for the love in the gift which makes me, who am physically the most unbumptious of men and authors, proud ; but also for its own very peculiar flowerage and fructification, for which I think I have as high a respect as any man in Britain. I stick it into my buttonhole and feel ——'s cork heels added to my heels."

On February 19, 1866, Browning writes to his wife: "I go out a great deal ; but have enjoyed nothing so much as a dinner last week with Tennyson, who with his wife and one son is staying in town for a few weeks, and she is just what she was, and always will be, very sweet and dear ; he seems to me better than ever." \

Then in November 1868, Tennyson's letter-diary to his wife contains a charming notice. The two

poets met at dinner, and Tennyson read the *Grail*, which Browning pronounced to be his "best and highest." Later in the evening Browning returned to read the preface of his new poem *The Ring and the Book*. Tennyson's wise and true comment was, "full of strange vigour and remarkable in many ways; doubtful whether it can ever be popular."

This mutual reverence and appreciation among the great should not be rare. "Envy is the fume of little minds." But clearly the great are few, and moral as well as intellectual greatness is needed to feel this simple and unreserved admiration of those who are rivals for public favour. Perhaps it argues that neither Tennyson nor Browning was really a candidate for public applause. Each lived his life and did his work in a noble simplicity, with "heart at leisure from itself to soothe and sympathise."

The meeting with Darwin, who called at Farringford on August 17, 1868, is highly characteristic. The poet's prevailing interests were scientific; when he took his son to Marlborough the 'headmaster invited the science masters to meet him; and botany, geology, and astronomy were studied as carefully as literature, history and philosophy. It is an interesting contrast. Darwin in his simple and truthful autobiography deplures that his absorption in science had destroyed his appreciation of art and of poetry. Tennyson, advancing with a less one-sided culture,

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*teres atque rotundus*, had no occasion to lament that his imaginative work impaired his scientific interests. On the contrary, his creations were usually built up on firm scientific foundations. The universe in which he lived was not a house of dreams, but that stupendous and awe-inspiring reality revealed by modern telescopes. His interest in mind never carried him away from the physical basis in matter. From first to last Science and Idealism put in an equal claim to his powers, and each benefited by the union accomplished in his person. The brief entry, therefore, in the wife's journal, though it whets the appetite for more, is yet very illuminating: "Mr Darwin called and seemed to be very kindly, unworldly and agreeable. A. said to him, 'Your theory of evolution does not make against Christianity,' and Darwin answered, 'No, certainly not.'" Indeed, Tennyson had in parts of *In Memoriam* anticipated evolution, as Browning had in *Paracelsus*; the two great poets of the century were the heralds of the greatest scientific truth of the century. And it is remarkable that they grasped at once what the world at large was slow to perceive, that the scientific truth was not to destroy but to purify and confirm the revelation of Christ.

And now we close the chapter with a photograph. Mrs Cameron, the near neighbour and dear friend of the Tennysons, was an enthusiast in photography,

and she was constantly enticing her friend Alfred to be taken. But better even than the photographs is this sketch of a dinner at which she was present: "We dined at seven and only got up from dinner at eleven. All this while the most brilliant conversation. The whole range of poetry comprised, every immortal poet brought to life, and living again in the glowing and wise breath of Alfred Tennyson in the quotations from Henry Taylor's rich and faithful memory. Each one recited favourite passages from Beaumont and Fletcher, favourite sonnets of Shakespeare's, all that was finest in my adored Wordsworth, and the god of poetic fire, Milton. They were like two brilliant fencers crossing their rapiers, or flashing their foils, giving and evading clean thrusts."

Chapter VII  
Dramas, Ballads and Poems,  
1872-1880

“Clouds and darkness  
Closed upon Camelot ;  
Arthur had vanished  
I knew not whither,  
The King who loved me  
And cannot die ;  
For out of the darkness  
Silent and slowly  
The Gleam, that had waned to  
    a wintry glimmer  
On icy fallow  
And faded forest,  
Drew to the valley  
Named of the shadow,  
And slowly brightening  
Out of the glimmer,  
And slowly moving again to a melody  
Yearningly tender,  
Fell on the shadow,  
No longer a shadow,  
But clothed with the Gleam.”

THIS fragment of autobiography shows that after the *Idylls of the King* came a period of depression and sorrow, though it also proves that the ideal which



had lured the poet onward could not die, and that gradually peace and joy returned. As he chose for his sundial the beautiful old motto, "horas non numero nisi serenas," so he did not record the hours of depression. Serenity prevailed, and at the end of this period—when he had reached the ordinary verge of human life, a year past seventy—we see him through the eyes of some American guests "in sombrero, a gray suit, broad shouldered, somewhat stooping, looking peaceful and contented."

It does not appear from the memoir of these years what was the occasion of this depression; he had the strong man's reticence about his inner troubles. It may have been partly the break-down in the health of his loyal wife, who in 1874, after the summer holiday, made her last entry in the journal, which has been hitherto the best source for following the poet's life: "On our return I had to answer many letters from unknown correspondents, asking advice from A. as to religious questions, and desiring criticism of poems, etc., and I became very ill, and could do but little, so my journal ends here." The remaining years of her life were passed on the sofa, and her words of patriotism, fearlessness and faith, came from the sanctuary of suffering; but it is easy to imagine that the strong sympathetic nature of the poet felt this decline of health as if it were his own. Then in April 1879 came an even heavier

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blow. His elder brother, Charles Tennyson Turner, the beloved Vicar of Grasby, the most lovable human being, Tennyson thought, he had ever met, died at Cheltenham; and in May his wife, Mrs Tennyson's younger sister, her husband's devoted helpmate, died too. It was a blow to stagger the poet's heart; the joint author of that earliest literary venture, the *Poems by Two Brothers*; the man whom Thackeray described as "the very image of Velasquez," the author of those exquisite sonnets, which Tennyson considered had all the tenderness of Greek epigram; he could not slip from the world without leaving a gap and a shadow in his brother's life. One turns with interest to that poem in the first little book (by C. T. or A. T. which?) entitled *The Dying Christian*

"It cannot die it cannot stay  
But leaves its darkened dust behind."—*Byron*.

I die, my limbs with icy feeling  
Bespeak that Death is near;  
His frozen hand each pulse is stealing;  
Yet still I do not fear!

There is a hope—not frail as that  
Which rests on human things—  
The hope of an immortal state,  
And with the King of Kings!

And ye may gaze upon my brow,  
Which is not sad, tho' pale;  
These hope illumined features show  
But little to bewail.

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Death should not chase the wonted bloom  
From off the Christian's face ;  
Ill prelude of the bliss to come,  
Prepared by heavenly grace.

Lament no more—no longer weep  
That I depart from men ;  
Brief is the intermediate sleep,  
And bliss awaits me then.

That was the early confidence of the boys ; and when the parting came the survivor did not weep, but the parting may well have chilled and numbed his heart.

It is, however, more than likely that the occasion of the wintry shadow, which for the moment seemed to quench the Gleam, was that disturbance of the old faith, and the general disintegration of thought, to which he alluded in the prefatory sonnet for the *Nineteenth Century*.

For some, descending from the sacred peak  
Of hoar high-templed Faith, have leagued again  
Their lot with ours to rove the world about ;  
And some are wilder comrades, sworn to seek  
If any golden harbour be for men  
In seas of Death and sunless gulfs of doubt.

Tennyson was a Christian, with a broad, genial, and inclusive creed. He dreaded the blight of materialism, and the degradation which falls on life when it is no longer regarded as immortal ; he felt that if Christ were resolved into myth, then "the hope of the world was a lie." And yet those years from 1872 to

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1880 witnessed the apparent triumph of materialism, criticism and negation. The *Descent of Man* was not yet understood, and seemed to reduce man to a level with the animals from which he was descended. Professor Tyndall's Belfast Address seemed to claim Matter as the Creator of all things. Matthew Arnold's *Literature and Dogma*, echoing the advanced criticism of the Continent, seemed to shatter any doctrine of inspiration. Strauss, and then Renan, had dissolved the story of Jesus into the tale, seen through mists of legend, of a somewhat dubious human life. Though Tennyson's thought and creed were always broad, and his works had themselves exercised a disintegrating effect on the straiter dogmas of an older school, he was no rationalist ; to him faith was everything, and he was deeply troubled by the tendencies which seemed to render it impossible. It is very likely, therefore, that the pessimistic ending of the *Idylls* was a reflection of his own feeling : the faith of the world was going down in storm and tumult and despair. "Arthur had vanished."

And if this is the correct interpretation of his mental condition, we have a further exhibition of a heroic nature which in these later days of life fought its doubts and laid them, going bravely on with duties and enterprises, and not inflicting on the public, or even on his friends and his family, the misery of the inward struggle. But for his own retrospective con-





*Aldwinstly*

fession, we might easily have supposed that this period was one of cheerful and honourable labour, brightened by the buoyancy of new enterprises and the joy of new successes. As we know from his own lips that it was otherwise, his courage and his manful victory come into the greater relief.

It was the period in which he most valiantly, to use Mr Gladstone's phrase, "struck a stroke for the nation." His whole soul seemed wrapped up in the greatness, the unity, the mission of his beloved country.

Already in 1867 the increasing popularity of Freshwater as a summer resort had led the Tennysons to secure a piece of land on Blackdown, near to Hind's Head, in Surrey. The name of the plot was changed from Blackhorse Copse to Aldworth; and on Shakespeare's birthday, April 23, 1868, the poet laid the foundation-stone of his new house, rejoicing in the inscription on it, "Prosper Thou the work of our hands, O prosper Thou our handiwork." In August the house was built, and they had taken possession: "nothing in it pleases me more than the bath, a perennial stream which falls through the house, and where I take three baths a day," he writes. Farringford was never given up; but when the flood of tourists made privacy there impossible, the retreat to Aldworth was effected, where not even the most venturesome tourist could break the sacred circle. Mr

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Lecky has observed : " There always seemed to me to be a strange and somewhat pathetic contrast between his character and his position. Nature evidently intended him for the life of the quietest and most secluded country gentleman, for a life spent among books and flowers and a few intimate friends, and very remote from the noise and controversies of the great world. Few men valued more highly domestic privacy. But a great gift had made his name a household word among the English race. True privacy, as he bitterly complained, became impossible to him, and troops of tourists, newspaper writers, and interviewers were constantly occupied with his doings."

He fled from the tourists; and Mr Lecky mentions a most amusing incident. In a walk one day at Blackdown, being very shortsighted, he saw what he took to be a group of tourists, and beat a disconcerted retreat, lest they should accost him. They were, however, only sheep.

" The new house," wrote Mrs Ritchie, " where for many years past the family has spent its summers, stands on the summit of a high lonely hill in Surrey, and yet it is not quite out of reach of London life. It is a white stone house, with many broad windows facing a great view and a long terrace, like some of those at Siena or Perugia, with a low parapet of stone, where ivies and roses are trained, making a



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foreground to the lovely haze of the distance. Sometimes at Aldworth, when the summer days are at their brightest, and Blackdown top has been well warmed and sunned, I have seen a little procession coming along the terrace walk and proceeding by its green boundary into a garden, where the sun shines its hottest upon a sheltered lawn, and where standard rose-trees burn their flames"—it was the poet in his cloak dragging the garden chair in which the beloved wife was lying, the sons, and others. "One special day I remember when we all sat for an hour round about the homely chair and the gentle occupant. It seemed not unlike a realisation of some Italian picture that I had somewhere seen—the tranquil eyes, the peaceful heights, the glorious summer day, some sense of lasting calm, of beauty beyond the present hour."

But if he sought privacy, and if he had a strong distaste for popularity and its empty applause, he had no intention of shutting himself from his kind. He kept the individual at a distance that he might do his work for humanity. His audience was now the whole English-speaking race: as he had to address this, the most important audience, as he thought it, in the world, he could not afford to fritter away his time in the chance intercourse of the hour. "I have known no literary man," says Mr Lecky, "who had a more uniformly high sense of duty in connection with his work."

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At this time in addition to the great fundamental questions of Faith, he was deeply interested in what we now call the Imperialist aspect of our national life. He passionately desired to see the colonies drawn close to the mother country, because he saw the best hope for humanity in the enlarged sympathies and nobler ideals which a great world-wide Empire, speaking one tongue and holding one faith would foster. He believed our Empire might be "a faithful and fearless leader in all that is good throughout the world." His reference to "that true North" in the epilogue to the *Idylls of the King* elicited a fervour of national enthusiasm in Canada, and Lord Dufferin wrote to tell the poet what good he had done, for which testimony he was touchingly thankful. To have done good was always to him the greatest joy that could come to him; compared with this he was less moved by Lord Dufferin's description of the *Idylls* as "the greatest poem of this generation."

But now, before we come to the series of dramas in which he sought to serve England by bringing out the crises of the national story, there are two or three features of this period of gloom which deserve attention. First of all, it is evident that his physical strength was unabated. In the Swiss tour of 1872, he took Lionel up the *Dent du chat*, a height of nearly 7000 feet, and the guide said he never saw a man of

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sixty-seven *si léger*. They saw Mont Blanc "like a great cathedral with three naves." Next year the tour was in the Engadine. The Val d'Anzasca he thought the grandest valley that he had seen in the Alps. There he began *The Voice and the Peak*, when at five o'clock in the morning he saw Monte Rosa stand up and take the morning beyond the walnut-covered slopes and heard the torrent

Green-rushing from the rosy thrones of dawn.

There is a deep meaning in the poem when we realise his state of mind at the time. Those everlasting hills would disappear,

Not raised for ever and ever,  
But when their cycle is o'er,  
The valley, the voice, the peak, the star  
Pass, and are found no more.

The peak is high and flushed  
At his highest with sunrise fire ;  
The peak is high and the stars are high,  
And the thought of a man is higher.

A deep below the deep,  
And a height beyond the height !  
Our hearing is not hearing,  
And our seeing is not sight.

In the autumn of this year he had a refreshing time at Cambridge, where Hallam was now an undergraduate. He was as happy as a boy, telling how he had idealised Nevile's Court in *The Princess*, and how the white-surpliced undergraduates in

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Trinity Chapel had suggested "six hundred maidens clad in purest white." "I see a ghost of a friend in every corner of the old place," he said. The son, it may be observed, on his mother's breakdown, renounced his university career—he did not return to Cambridge after 1875, but returned home to be his father's faithful companion and secretary, and to qualify himself for writing the priceless records of the life. The tour of 1874 was once more in the Pyrenees, where for a third time he visited the sacred valley of Cauteretz; the first time had been with Arthur Hallam, the second with the beloved wife who more than filled Hallam's empty place in his life, and now the last was with the son who bore Hallam's name. It was after this tour that the wife became an invalid, confined to her couch. In 1875, however, she was able to go to Pau, where Lionel, aged 21, became engaged to Emily Locker.

Another remark on these dark days may be made: out of his gloom came "power in the night," sympathy with bereavement, power to comfort and uplift. The letter he wrote to Locker, on the death of Lady Charlotte Locker, April 28, 1872, is very significant: "Sure at least I am that, even in this first anguish of grief, you can think with thankfulness that the weary days of suffering are over for ever with your dearest one, and can trust she is happy now with

the God and Saviour she has loved and served. May He strengthen you to bear your immeasurable loss. Is there not, even in its greatness, that which helps to make it bearable? Had she been less a creature of light and love, you could not have had the beautiful memory or the sustaining help you now have." In 1874, when the dear friend "Old Brooks" passed away, he wrote to Mrs Brookfield: "You will believe that I feel with you, and that I feel that the *dead* lives whatever the pseudo-savants say, and so may God bless you and yours." Two months later he tried to comfort his old friend Monckton-Milnes on the death of his wife: "I was the other day present at a funeral here, and one of the chief mourners reached me her hand silently almost over the grave, and I as silently gave her mine. No words were possible; and this little note, that can do really nothing to help you in your sorrow, is just such a reaching of the hand to you, my old college comrade of more than forty years' standing, to show you that I think of you. You have your children; she must live to you more or less in them, and to you and others in the memory and result of her good and charitable life: and I may say that I think I can see as far as one can see in this twilight, that the noble nature does not pass from its individuality when it passes out of this one life. If you could believe as much, it would

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be a comfort to you, and perhaps you do. I did not intend to say even so much as this, and will say no more, only that I am yours affectionately." He frequently dwelt on this intuitive conviction of immortality, and the belief in God and in Providence that is inseparable from it.

From this point of view he was deeply interested in the writings of James Hinton, that good physician who was so absorbed in the thought of the universe that he one day wrote out a prescription "to be rubbed round the world night and morning." *The Mystery of Matter* chimed in with his own convictions; he found it increasingly easier to believe in Spirit than in Matter. He would quote as his own belief the lines,

My God, I would not live  
Save that I think this gross hard seeming world  
Is our misshaping vision of the Powers  
Behind the world, that make our grief our gains.

When he met George Eliot, who was an avowed Positivist, resolving personal immortality into the mere survival of the memory of the individual in the race, he could not refrain from saying, as they parted, "I wish you well with your molecules." She replied: "I get on very well with my molecules." Yet when George Lewis died, though he felt he could not send her any Christian consolation, his heart went out in Christian sympathy: "Dear Friend, our affectionate

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sympathies are with you. That is all that can be said at present, and these 'words' are nothing to you at present, but for his sake accept them."

Clearly here was not one who would allow inward distractions and bewilderments to arrest him in his work as the brother and comforter of men. A lady visiting at Farringford in 1875, wrote: "I cannot tell you what a happy time we had. If I am not better for it I ought to be; talking with A. T. seemed to lift me out of the earth-earthly. It is like what a retreat is to the religious."

It is a great consolation for the good man who has to walk in dark places and touch but tombs, wrestling with the grim spectres of the mind, that his own darkened sphere may, like the moon, still reflect the sun, and his greatest power of help and blessing to his fellow-creatures may come in the night, and even in the anguish of some Gethsemane, or Calvary.

It was in these days of doubt and unsettlement that the Metaphysical Society was formed, which owed its existence, says Mr Knowles, to Tennyson. The object was to bring thinkers of various types together to discuss the great fundamental principles of Thought and of Life. At first only Christian thinkers were to belong to it, though they might be Christians of any denomination. But it was felt, especially by Dean Stanley, that opponents should be allowed to

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state their case. Stanley also suggested that the Society should bear the name Metaphysical and not Theological as at first proposed. Tennyson was deeply interested in the project, though he was only present ten times out of a hundred in ten years, and never spoke more than a sentence or two. His poem, the *Higher Pantheism*, was read there, but not discussed. He greatly longed for the union of all good men in practical religion, and would have rejoiced in the movement for the reunion of the Churches, and still more perhaps in that *rapprochement* of thought which, in the closing days of the century, has brought men of the most dissimilar views into harmony of feeling and action. "Modern science," he said at one of the early meetings, "ought at all events to have taught men to separate light from heat." He had perfect toleration for other men's views; nothing made him intolerant unless it was the cynical denial of the spiritual world altogether, which he felt was robbing mankind of their hope and joy. He sided in the Society with the more conservative thinkers. He admired the first president, the Ultramontane Ward. "If I had Ward's blind faith I should always be happy," he would say. Fortunately for the world he had not; blind faith helps no one, but the faith in the twilight ever struggling to see, which is the great characteristic of the poet's works, has helped many doubters to be-



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lieve, and consoled them in their prolonged and weary wrestle. As Dr Martineau said of his poetry, "In laying bare the history of his own spirit, its conflicts and aspirations, its alternate eclipse of doubt and glow of faith, it has reported more than a personal experience; he has told the story of an age which he has thus brought into self-knowledge. And as he has never for himself surrendered the traditional form of a devout faith, till he has seized its permanent spirit, and invested it with a purer glory, so has he saved it for others by making it fairer than they had dreamt. Among thousands of readers previously irresponsive to anything Divine he has created or immeasurably intensified, the susceptibility of religious reverence."

The Metaphysical Society perished, Tennyson said, because after ten years of strenuous effort no one had succeeded in even defining the term Metaphysics! But the memory of it remains as an indication of his intense and practical zeal in laying firmly the foundations of faith, and in finding the truth by which a man may live. It left upon all who met him in that connection an impression of his Catholic sympathy, of his sincere good-will to all Christian creeds, and Christian organisations, and of his desire that all who bear the Christian name should sink their differences and unite in a consistent effort to benefit mankind by asserting the reality of

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the spiritual world, the love of God, the salvation which is in Christ.

But now we come to the main work of these years, the creation of a group of English dramas which aimed at carrying on the series of Shakespeare's historical plays. He had a great interest in the drama, and actors always found him an astonishingly helpful critic. He hoped that some day, the State, or at least municipalities, would maintain theatres for the presentation of national plays, so that modern England might be trained in a knowledge of her part, and thrilled by a feeling of the forces that had made her, just as the great Elizabethan epoch was taught by Shakespeare's histories, or even as the Athenian state was elevated and inspired by the masterpieces of Æschylus, Agathon, or Sophocles. But when he ventured in his sixty-fifth year, to enter on a new species of composition, it was not so much in the interests of the theatre—he complained that a playwright was always hampered by having to compose with a view to particular actors—as in the interests of his country; he wished to bring home to the men of his own race some of the things which had lifted them to their place of privilege among the nations and of service to the world. His first idea was to write a play on Lady Jane Grey. He put aside the subject of William the Silent, deeply as it had moved him in the pages of Motley, because,

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though the religious lesson was the same, he wished to move in the English atmosphere which he better understood. Finally the centre of his play was found in the tragic person of Queen Mary; and his great lesson was woven about her name.

The labour involved in the study for this play may be estimated from what was only the first list of books which he read for it: Collier's *Ecclesiastical History*, Fuller's *Church History*, Burnet's *Reformation*, Fox's *Book of Martyrs*, Hayward's *Edward*, Cave's *P. X. Y.*, Hooker, Neale's *History of the Puritans*, Strype's *Ecclesiastical Memorials*, Cranmer, Parker, Philips' *Pole*, *Primitive Fathers no Papists*, Lingard's *History of England*, *Church Historians of England*, *Zürich Letters*, and *Original Letters and Correspondence of Archbishop Parker*, in addition to Froude, Holinshed and Camden.

He had a great task to perform, and he spared no pains. Though he had a deep compassion for Mary herself, and was absolutely free from bigotry, he was determined to show how the greatness of England had grown from shaking off the yoke of Rome. The picture of Cranmer, his vacillation, his humility, penitence and sweetness and martyr-courage, is drawn with convincing skill. He wished England to realise that "after the era of priestly domination comes the era of the freedom of the individual." All his heart was in that message, his personal friendship for

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Roman Catholics, like Simeon and Ward and Aubrey de Vere, and his profound deference to the leaders of a great Church like Newman and Manning, make his lesson all the more impressive. He saw with a poet's insight that the Roman domination is the blight of a people, and that not blind faith, but the strenuous and open-minded search for truth, is what makes a nation virile and effective. Froude wrote enthusiastically: "Beyond the immediate effect, you'll have hit a more fatal blow than a thousand pamphleteers and controversialists; besides this you have reclaimed one more section of English history from the wilderness and given it a form in which it will be fixed for ever. No one since Shakespeare has done that. When we were beginning to think that we should have no more from you, you have given us the greatest of all your works." Browning the poet was as eulogistic as the historian: "It is astonishingly fine; conception, execution, the whole and the parts, I see nowhere the shade of a fault." The play was successful on the stage; but the fixed impression that Tennyson was not a dramatic poet has prevented the world hitherto from giving this first of his dramas its meed of praise.

He followed it up however next year, 1875, with *Harold*, the purpose of which was to present the ideal of an English King, before the arrival of the Norman, but at the same time to exhibit the tragedy of a

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brave and noble character involved in a doom by a violated oath. The theologians would absolve the king of his oath, but his conscience would not; and yet Harold rises above his defeat and punishment to anticipate the reward of the pure in spirit hereafter. The poet achieved a moral victory in the dedication of his poem to the son of the author of another *Harold*. The only bitter passage Tennyson ever had with a literary man, was, as we saw, with Sir Edward Lytton Bulwer. It was a noble amends after all these years to send this peace-offering to the son, Lord Lytton. "I cannot let a mail go by," was the answer from the Governor-General of India, "without asking you to believe how flattered I am by the honour you have done me, and how sensibly touched by your manner of doing it." But the drama was also the means of conveying his Imperialistic message. In Harold's fate there seemed to be "the doom of England"; but the poet gives, in a vision, another meaning to the phrase:

The tree, cleft and drenched in blood,  
Grew ever high and higher, beyond my seeing,  
And shot out sidelong boughs across the deep,  
That dropt themselves, and rooted in far isles,  
Beyond my seeing; and the great Angel rose  
And past again along the highest, crying  
'The doom of England.'

Longfellow and Aubrey de Vere, brother poets, were enthusiastic about this play. But even old

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Thomas Carlyle could scarce forbear a cheer. It was "full of wild pathos," he said, "and founded on the Bayeux tapestry, a very blessed work indeed." "Alfred always from the beginning took a grip at the right side of every question," this was the judgment of one who cared for goodness more than for genius. . . .

In 1879 *Becket* was written, the third of the Trilogy of Historic Plays. Its purpose was to exhibit the assertion of the national authority against the claims of the Mediæval Church. Its historical accuracy may be judged by the remark of John Richard Green, the brilliant historian, that "all his researches in the twelfth century had not given him so vivid a conception of the character of Henry II. and his court." But the poet's fairness of judgment is even more remarkable. He saw the greatness of Becket, and loved his humanity and tenderness for the poor; and he could sympathise with the grand conception of the Church as a Divine Power dominating thrones and governments, though he knew its practical fallacy. The result of this breadth of sympathy was that even Ultramontane Ward broke into applause: "Dear me! I did not expect to enjoy it at all. It is splendid. How wonderfully you have brought out the phases of his character as Chancellor and Archbishop! Where did you get it all?" The play was not put on the stage till 1891, but then Sir Henry Irving pronounced it better than *King John*, and said it was

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one of the three most successful plays produced by him at the Lyceum. "I know that such a play," he said, "has an ennobling influence on both the audience who see it and the actors who play in it."

*The Cup*, founded on a story in Lecky's European Morals, though without the historical weight of the Trilogy, achieved an immediate success and ran for one hundred and thirty nights in 1881. *The Foresters*, a picture of England in the days of Magna Charta, and the *Falcon* had some success on the stage. But as the lofty utterance of one of the greatest Englishmen of the nineteenth century we may surmise that the great Trilogy has never yet received its adequate recognition. When a play seeks its fortune on the stage it descends in the public eye, for the time, from its rank as literature. That was true even of Shakespeare. But when their suitability for acting is put out of the question, and these three poems come to be studied as the outcome of five hard years of work, when the poet was fighting a spiritual battle within and eager for the glory of England without, they may come to be regarded as great enough in themselves to secure their writer an assured place in English literature.

During these years most generous recognition came from many of the leaders of thought and of national life. Lord Selborne was profoundly moved

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by the dedication to himself of *Becket*, as the occupant of the historical office which St Thomas held. He regarded the dedication as "the greatest real honour that had ever been done" to him. "That you should be my *vates sacer* and let those remote generations of the best spirits among the English speaking race, who will read your works, know that there is something in me which had won your friendship and esteem, is more than I could have hoped for." After Tennyson's death, Lord Selborne said: "He realised to me more than anyone else whom I have known the 'heroic' idea. . . . He was great in himself as well as in his work; the foremost man, in my eyes, of all his generation, and entitled to be ranked with the greatest of the generations before him."

But more than these magnificent eulogies the poet valued the tributes of humble and obscure people. He was greatly charmed with two letters from America, one in 1873 enclosing flowers: "These nurslings of our fall and summer skies which thinking of you I plucked, I send as messengers of the love and respect and affection, nay the gratitude, which I bear to one whom God has so greatly blessed with such good gifts, with so true an eye, so exquisite an ear, for all sights and sounds of this our beautiful and mysterious world. . . . The purest and truest pleasures of my life



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have been derived from you"; the other from the son of an old Somersby bricklayer, full of reminiscences of the old Doctor and the Tennysons as children: "Have I tired you? Well my heart grows soft and young again in looking over the long past, tho' I have sailed the seas over, I've crossed the ocean wide. If this goes into your waste basket, please excuse the scrawl." But it did not go into the basket; a line or two of cordial thanks was sent.

He had, as we have frequently noticed, an unconquerable sympathy with the common people and with the poor. Jowett mentions that he would sit by a very ordinary person telling stories with the most high bred courtesy, endless stories not too high or too low for everyday conversation. And his son adds that he loved to converse with the country-folk, and especially to learn from poor *old* men their thoughts upon death and the future life.

Probably few men whom he met at this time gave him more pleasure than General Gordon, "with his look of utter benevolence and bonhomie," who came to lunch at the London house, which was taken annually "to rub our country rust off." Gordon was full of schemes for the good of men. He took with him to the Soudan an edition of the poems in small volumes, and wrote: "I find the reading of Tennyson is my great relief." The cenotaph Tennyson

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wrote for the hero evidently sprang from the heart :

Warrior of God, man's friend, not laid below,  
But somewhere dead far in the waste Soudan,  
Thou livest in all hearts, for all men know  
This earth has borne no simpler nobler man.

Renan also came as a visitor and a characteristic word fell from the poet's lips. "It is better to illuminate history with genius as you have done," said the Frenchman, "than with mere research." Immediately Tennyson replied: "You are a prose-poet, M. Renan, and perhaps in this instance too imaginative."

Another pleasant interview of 1879 was with the Princess of Wales. She asked him to read to her his *Welcome to Alexandra*. When the reading was done, the fact of the author reading a complimentary poem to the Princess herself, struck them as so ludicrous, that he threw the book down and they both fell into uncontrollable laughter.

Three years before there was a visit to Mr Gladstone at Hawarden, and the old statesman and the old poet talked over *Harold*, and Dante, the Income Tax, modern morality, public opinion, the evils of materialism and the new Biblical Criticism. Unhappily there was no one by to record at length those priceless dialogues.

But by far the most beautiful relations of this time were the continued mutual love and appreciation of

the two poets, Tennyson and Browning. When *Red Cotton Nightcap Country* came, Tennyson wrote: "I feel rather ashamed that I have nothing of my own to send you back, but your Muse is prolific as Hecuba, and mine by the side of her an old barren cow." It was Browning who was eager to tell the author how *Queen Mary* went on the stage. The performance was not quite so good as he has seen in what Carlyle calls "the private theatre under his own hat," because there and then not a line nor a word was left out; nay there were abundant encores of half the speeches. Still it was good and "the love as well as admiration for the author was conspicuous." Browning calls *Harold* "another great work, wise, good, and beautiful. The scene where Harold is overborne to take the oath is perfect for one instance. What a fine new ray of light you are entwining with your many coloured wreath."

This was on December 21, 1876. Presently came an answer in the form of a dialogue between husband and wife after dinner at Aldworth:

"*Wife*. Why don't you write and thank Mr Browning for his letter?

*Husband*. Why should I? I sent him my book and he acknowledged it.

*W*. But such a great and generous acknowledgment.

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H. That's true.

W. Then you should write; he has given you your crown of violets.

H. He is the greatest-brained poet in England. Violets fade, he has given me a crown of gold.

W. Well, I meant the troubadour crown of golden violets; pray write; you know I would if I could, but I am lying here helpless and horizontal and can neither write nor read.

H. Then I'll go up and smoke my pipe and write to him.

W. You'll go up and concoct an imaginary letter over your pipe which you'll never send.

H. Yes, I will, I'll report our talk.

He goes up and smokes, and spite of pipe writes and signs himself

A. TENNYSON."

Once when Tennyson was charged with plagiarism, Browning exclaimed; "Why, you might as well suspect the Rothschilds of picking pockets!"

Nothing did Tennyson value more than Browning's dedication of a selection of his poems:

TO ALFRED TENNYSON

In poetry illustrious and consummate,  
In friendship noble and sincere.

*Aristophanes' Apology* Tennyson called "another jet from his full fountain," and for the *Inn Album* he wrote, "You are the most brotherly of poets, and your brother in the muses thanks you with the affection

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of a brother. *She* would thank you too on paper if she could put hand to pen."

When the two were together, the most widely-read men, perhaps, of their time, one who was privileged to hear declared, that the wisdom, the information on every imaginable topic, the repartee, the quip, the anecdote, the epigram, made a brilliance of conversation which it would be impossible to reproduce. There are few arguments for immortality more cogent than the thought of those two wise poets, over seventy, both with the glowing certainty of the future life in their hearts, and, if men were to die and not live again, the most lamentable instance of creative waste imaginable. How can these consummate minds be slowly developed, trained, furnished, matured, only to perish?

In May 1880, Tennyson courteously refused to stand for the Lord Rectorship of the Glasgow University, because he would be the nominee of a party. He declined to classify himself politically or religiously, though in both departments his insight was keen and his conviction strong. How shrewd for instance was his comment in 1875 on the French Republic: "I know it is the custom to prophesy change in France, but I am not so sure that the Republic which M. Rouher denounced, will not surprise many of them in

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its duration. They can have perpetual change of their men in power now."

In June he and his son visited Venice and Verona, and enjoyed most of all the Lago di Garda, with Sirmio, rich in memories of his beloved Catullus. Was there not an implicit tribute to his own brother who had recently been snatched away by death in his exquisite *Frater Ave atque Vale*? And was not his intense joy in the place the contrast between

The poet's hopeless woe,  
Tenderest of Roman poets nineteen hundred years ago,

and his own wistful but unwavering faith that he would see his brother again, and know him when he met, and sit with him at endless feast?

The volume of *Ballads and Poems* published this year, 1880, was a surprise to the world. Lionel had been married in 1875, and the volume was dedicated to the little grandson, golden-haired Ally. It afforded proof positive that the wintry gloom had gone, and the Gleam was sufficiently visible again. He seemed even to be renewing his own golden dawn.

The righteous shall bear fruit in old age; and never did a poet in his seventy-first year produce a volume of such fire and force and variety, so rich in music and so profound in teaching!

It was a book of laughter and tears, simple, majestic,

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passionate. It opened with *The First Quarrel*, that pathetic warning against being "wroth with those we love." Then came *Rizpah* which unites the poet's mastery of music with the tragic concentration and insight of his friend Browning. Then came *The Northern Cobbler* with all the broad humour of the other dialect poems, but touching a new chord of moral earnestness; for this is the finest stroke against the besetting national sin that any of our teachers has given us in this age. Then this harp of divers tones passed to *The Revenge*, that amazing poem produced in a day from the line

At Florés in the Azorés Sir Richard Grenville lay,

which had lain on his desk for years, waiting its psychological moment of birth, the poem which extracted from Carlyle the commendation: "Eh! he has got the grip of it!" Then in this varied volume the poet sounded again the note which has made England great by telling the story of "the good Lord Cobham," who as a follower of Wyclif shone with the early star of the Reformation. Then there was *The Defence of Lucknow*, and there was *Columbus*, fit to stand as a twin poem with the early *Ulysses*. And then, in some ways the most touching utterance that ever came from the poet's heart, there was *In the Children's Hospital*. It is the nurse of little Emmie that speaks out the faith of "the good Lord Jesus":

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How could I bear with the sights and the loathsome smells of  
disease

But that He said 'Ye do it to Me when you do it to these'?

But there is no mistaking the fervour with which the poet speaks through the nurse.

Altogether, but that enthusiasm had now for some years been exhausted in receiving the poet's work, this volume would have won him the laurel-crown of the century. Certainly the years of struggle had ended gloriously; "to a melody yearningly tender," the Gleam "fell on the shadow, no longer a shadow, but clothed with the Gleam."

Acknowledgments of gratitude and expressions of admiration poured in upon the writer. He was thankful, but not exalted. "The poet," he said, "can scarcely be judged with fairness in one age or another. He must abide the judgment of the ages." It is difficult to imagine a time when men will not read with enjoyment *Rizpah*, *The Revenge*, or *The Defence of Lucknow*, but it is impossible to believe that in "the roll of the ages" the beauty of the life and character which produced such works at the age of seventy and received the praise for them with such humility, could cease to impress the human mind. "These poems," said Locker, "will remain the highest expression of the imaginative mind of his epoch, and he will continue to shine, a beautiful and serene star, in the poetic heavens."



## Chapter VIII

### The Last Poems, 1881-1891

“ And broader and brighter  
The Gleam flying onward,  
Wed to the melody,  
Sang through the world ;  
And slower and fainter,  
Old and weary,  
But eager to follow,  
I saw, whenever  
In passing it glanced upon  
Hamlet or city,  
That under the crosses  
The dead man’s garden,  
The mortal hillock  
Would break into blossom ;  
And so to the land’s last limit I came—  
And can no longer,  
But die rejoicing,  
For through the Magic  
Of Him the Mighty,  
Who taught me in childhood,  
There on the border  
Of boundless Ocean,  
And all but in Heaven  
Hovers the Gleam.”

THERE is no test of character so severe as old age. The bodily powers decay, and the vision seems to fail ; the heavy depression of the years, and the drag of the earth, bring down the spirit, and the light of the ideal is quenched. In these ten years, beyond

the allotted span, the old poet had to see his friends depart one by one, and most agonising of all, had to say farewell to a tenderly cherished son. Severe illness came, and there were weary months in the sick-room. Public life presented many complexities and anxieties, all of which he felt keenly.

In this period, when life presents itself as "mere glimmerings and decays," the vitality and strength of Tennyson's soul showed how strenuously he had utilised the discipline of the past. Study, composition, fresh designs, went on as of old. One or two of the loveliest, and many of the profoundest, of his poems were written. The note which is struck in *Crossing the Bar* was the note of the whole period. It cannot be said that he entirely escaped the earthy languors of old age; sometimes the pessimism which comes easily to that period of life would gain a temporary hold; sometimes the elemental brusqueness of his nature might get the better of him; he would be despondent about the present, and make gloomy forecasts of the future, condition of the world. But on the whole there is a brave and trustful spirit, working out with unflagging purpose the task committed to him. And we are constantly reminded of that early poem which typified in a line these calm and solemn years of the approaching rest:

And the stately ships go on to their haven under the hill.

In 1881 James Spedding, the famous editor of Bacon, and one of the old Cambridge friends, was run over by a cab and died in St George's Hospital. Tennyson had a great admiration for Bacon, whom he regarded, at least in certain passages, as the most uplifting of our writers; but the loss of Spedding was more than the regret in losing the great commentator on a great author, it was the loss of one of the living stones that built up the temple of the poet's life. Notwithstanding his confessed neglect of correspondence he kept up a warm and sympathetic relation with the old friends. They were very much to him, one might almost say part of him; to remove them was to shake the whole fabric of his being.

In 1882 Carlyle went. In this case the loss was not so personal. But Carlyle had been so fixed a star in the literary sky all through the poet's life, and their intercourse together had been so genial and stimulating that the gap was probably a trouble, as it certainly could never be filled.

In 1883 came the death of Edward Fitzgerald, the translator of the *Rubaiyât* of Omar Khayám, who had been, however captious and whimsical, a loyal friend and even devotee. His letters were full of badinage, and in reference to some old standing joke he used to describe Tennyson as "the paltry poet." It seems, too, that at one time he persuaded the poet to become a vegetarian

a fact to which allusion is made in the genial dedication of the *Tiresias* volume to him ; for, beyond all expectation, the experiment produced something in the nature of a vision : " I never saw any landscape," he said, " that came up to the landscapes I have seen in my dreams. The mountains in Switzerland seem insignificant compared with the mountains I have imagined. One of the most wonderful experiences I ever had was this. I had gone without meat for six weeks (it is ten in the poem), living only on vegetables, and at the end of the time when I came to eat a mutton chop I shall never forget the sensation. I never felt such joy in my blood. When I went to sleep I dreamt that I saw the vines of the south, with huge Eshcol branches, trailing over the glaciers of the North."

The dedication referred to shows how the poet valued the true friend, and liked to recall

When, in our younger London days,  
You found some merit in my rhymes,  
And I more pleasure in your praise.

And now, old Fitz, a senior only by one year, was gone.

In 1886 came what was the greatest bereavement of his life. Even all the passion and devotion to Arthur Hallam, which never seemed to wane, could hardly equal the yearning love of a father for a lost son. Lionel, who had married Eleanor Locker in

1878, and given him that beloved little grandson Alfred, with whom, on one occasion he had changed hats, and was found by a distinguished American, "the poet's black sombrero on the child's head, the child's blue ribbon straw on the poet's towering brow"—Lionel, who had won all hearts at Eton and Trinity by his unselfishness, his open-heartedness, his humour—Lionel who had become a recognised authority in the India Office, and seemed to start his life at the top of the ladder—this joy of the father's heart, was taken. Four lines in the second *Locksley Hall* may be taken as a portrait, drawn by the father's hand :

Truth, for Truth is Truth, he worshipped, being true as he was  
 brave ;  
 Good, for Good is Good, he followed, yet he looked beyond  
 the grave !  
 Truth for Truth, Good for Good ! The good, the true, the  
 pure, the just !  
 Take the charm 'for ever' from them and they crumble into  
 dust.

In this year 1886 Lionel went, at Lord Dufferin's invitation, on a tour to India. While shooting in Assam he caught jungle fever. He lay ill for weeks at Calcutta ; the Dufferins nursed him with the tenderest care, and reported, "nothing could exceed his courage and his patience and his goodness to us all." He started for home, but died on the voyage, and was committed to the phosphorescent sea.

Not more to bid my boy farewell,  
When That within his coffin fell,  
Fell and flashed into the Red Sea,  
Beneath a hard Arabian moon  
And alien stars.

Visitors, like Oliver Wendell Holmes, were touched by the poet's patience under his sorrow, and by his unselfish thoughtfulness for others, but in the home circle he would say: "The thought of Lionel's death tears me to pieces, he was so full of promise and so young." The sorrow never waned before father and son were again united. On March 16th—the boy's birthday—1890, the elder brother enters in his journal: "Talked about my brother Lionel, this being his birthday; and of the after-life being the cardinal-point of Christ's teaching; and of *The Messiah*, *Pilgrim's Progress*, and *Paradise Lost*, as the three greatest religious works produced in England." Four days later he said: "Love is the highest we feel, therefore we must believe that God is Love. We cannot but believe that the Creation is infinite if God is infinite." It was the compensation of his great and inseparable sorrow that it opened up for him the reaches of the spiritual world, and showed him the Divine.

There is something very pathetic in the fact that just under the shadow of this great loss, the old shepherd on the Farringford estate, who was ninety-two years of age, on the point of death exclaimed,





Alfred Lord Tennyson.

E.W.







"I should like to see master again : he is a wonderful man for Nature and Life." They had had many talks together. And now the master put upon his tomb :

"God's finger touched him and he slept."

In 1889 Browning died ; but about that we must speak presently.

It was, then, in the shadow of death, and with the murmur of farewells about him that these last ten years were spent. But his intense faith in the after-world, and his vivid interest in all that was going on around him, would not let him languish in useless grief. And no period seems more filled with eager activities, or more tranquil and happy. At the beginning of this period Millais painted him—and the artist considered it his finest portrait. At the end of the period another picture was made by Watts, the one which is hung in the Hall of Trinity. The face is wrinkled and weather-stained. But there is in it the clear alert look of one who is accustomed to govern men. The seer is there, and the thinker ; but more of the man of affairs, than of the dreamer. It is very noticeable that as Tennyson draws near the next world, the energetic and practical side of his genius seems to develop as if in preparation for approaching work : "So many worlds, so much to do."

He was intensely interested in the struggle for the

spiritual view of things, which in the early eighties seemed to be at death-grips with the secularist and unbelieving tendencies of thought. He congratulated a poet—Roden Noel—on his volume, in the hope that it would “fight the good fight against materialism successfully.” In November 1881 appeared his poem, *Despair*, in the *Nineteenth Century*. “A man and his wife having lost faith in a God, and hope of a life to come, and being utterly miserable in this, resolve to end themselves by drowning.” In the following year the polemic against materialism seemed to reach a climax, by the production of *The Promise of May*. The villain of the piece is a freethinker. During the performance Lord Queensberry arose and protested against “Mr Tennyson’s abominable caricature.” But discerning minds saw the value of the piece. Gladstone was delighted, and accounted for the disturbance by saying that it was above the comprehension of the vast mass of the people present.

It may well be that the poet took extreme cases. Unbelievers in Christianity do not, any more than believers, go to the logical extremities of their position. Most of them are greatly influenced by the habits of thought which exist around them. The rigour of their conclusions is modified by the social belief of the community in which they live. But the poet was justified in isolating the principle

and showing how it would work out if it were unlet, unhindered, by the retarding forces of the ancient faith. It can hardly be doubted but that the action of the man and his wife in *Despair* is logical, if not probable, enough. If there is no God, and if there is no future, one may reasonably argue with Hamlet, "why grunt and sweat under a weary life?" The protests against *The Promise of May* were certainly based on a misunderstanding. Edgar, the villain, is not meant to be a typical freethinker; but being bad he wraps about him the weeds of free thought, which come to his hand: the poet's purpose is not so much to expose free thought, as to show that sin brings its own Nemesis, whatever view men may take of the universe. The man has to confront the girl he has betrayed: his wickedness itself becomes his punishment; he passes out into life to expiate with life-long contrition the ill which cannot be undone.

The fact is, the poet's mind was more and more impressed with the need of God and the future world to give significance to the things of the present life. Once, about this time, he was listening to the service in the abbey, when he suddenly exclaimed: "It is beautiful, but what empty and awful mockery if there were no God." While the world was taking him to task for the assertion of his convictions, he was writing to a workman who had written asking whether he should adopt poetry

as a profession and mentioning his own loneliness and sorrow: "Let me hope that you, having, as I think, found the God of love, will feel less lonely among your fellowmen; for, loving God, you cannot but grow in love towards them, and so forget yourself in them, since love begets love."

In 1882 he read the life of Penn, and the character of the great Quaker made a strong impression on him as "no comet of a season but the fixed light of a dark and graceless age, shining on into the present, not only great but good." And the general tenour of his thought, the sense of shadow, the misgiving about the age, mastered by the great faith, is well expressed in the lines he wrote for Caxton's epitaph in St Margaret's, Westminster:

Thy prayer was, Light, more light while time shall last.  
Thou sawest a glory growing on the night  
But not the shadows which that light would cast,  
Till shadows vanish in the Light of Light.

In September 1883 all his interests in public affairs were deepened by his voyage in the *Pembroke Castle* with Gladstone. It was a quickening time. They left their native land at Barrow, thousands of people lining the shore and cheering for 'Gladstone' and 'Tennyson.' They went to the far north, Loch Maree, then to Kirkwall, where the poet and the statesman received the freedom of the town. Then they sailed to Norway: and on to Copenhagen.

There was a notable collection of crowned heads feasting together, the King and Queen of Denmark, the Princess of Wales, the Czar and Czarina, the King and Queen of Greece, etc. It is curious to feel how much more kingly the crowned poet is than the titular heads of states ; they pass, and their splendour is but a name, but the poet's crown of bay never fades.

There is an amusing story of the visit to Copenhagen. In the ship's smoking room he read one or two of his poems. The Czarina was very complimentary. He, supposing in his shortsightedness that she was one of the maids of honour, patted her on the shoulder and said, "Thank you, my dear."

These festivities left delightful memories behind ; but the conversation between the statesman and the poet was more fruitful than the resounding compliments of the great. That faithful son who accompanied his father on the voyage has recorded his impressions of these talks : " My father was logical and brilliant in his talk, made his points clearly, and every word and phrase of his, as in his poems and plays, bore directly on the subject under discussion. Gladstone took longer to go from point to point, and wrapt up his argument in analogies which he thoroughly thrashed out before he returned to his thesis. . . . Like my father he was always most anxious to learn from anyone whom he thought better informed than

himself on the matter in hand." Everything in public life and literature was discussed; the old men reverted with longing to their early friend Arthur Hallam. But they were "jovial together as boys out for a holiday." Nothing struck Gladstone more than the poet's promptitude in praising anything in which he saw merit, written by writers' however obscure. The greatest statesman and the most famous poet of their time in this daily intercourse, cheerful, unrestrained, and discursive, form one of those pictures on which the imagination delights to dwell, and to which perhaps later ages will delight to recur.

The buoyancy and good spirits left by the voyage are reflected in the letter to the Queen of Denmark accompanying some of his books. "Allow me to say how much I, old man in my seventy-fifth year, was charmed by the kindness and true-heartedness of your royal Danish children, and believe me, I can't say loyally, for your Majesty is not my queen, yet, at anyrate loyally in the old knightly way, A. Tennyson." As he said to Mary Boyle at this time: "I verily believe that the better heart of me beats stronger at seventy-four than ever it did at eighteen." Bishop Phillips Brooks has left us a beautiful picture of the poet, whom he saw this year at Farringford—we cannot have too many of these impressionist pictures, which all who saw him were prompted to



attempt: "A big dome of a head, bald on the forehead and the top and very fine to look at. A deep bright eye, a grand eagle nose, a mouth which you cannot see, a black felt hat and a loose tweed suit. . . . We smoked and he talked of metaphysics and poetry, and religion, his own life, and Hallam and all the poems. It was very delightful, for he was gentle and reverent and tender and hopeful."

It was during the voyage on the *Pembroke Castle* that the question of the peerage was mooted. In 1873 Mr Gladstone, and in 1874 Mr Disraeli, offered him a baronetcy. He did not desire it for himself, but asked that the title might devolve on his son. This, however, appeared to be without precedent. Now in 1883 Gladstone was very anxious that literature should be honoured in the person of its noblest representative. Nor was it only on literary grounds that the statesman wished to confer the honour. The laureate's political poems were, he considered, among the wisest of political utterances. What weighed with the poet was the Queen's wish, combined with the reluctance to refuse any tribute paid to literature. "By Gladstone's advice," he said to his son, "I have consented to take the peerage, but for my own part I shall regret my simple name all my life."

It is curious that many people who, rightly judging that the title of poet is greater than any in the peerage, feel that "the Laureate of the tongue" was not

raised in dignity by the honour conferred, are disposed to blame him for accepting it. But what inclined him to take a peerage, while he persistently refused a baronetcy, was that the latter is an empty title, while the former was a call to what he considered the greatest legislative chamber in the world, "foremost in debating power, a stable, wise, and moderating influence in these changeful democratic days." His patriotic feeling, and his profound interest in public affairs, had grown with years. The imperial position of his country, as we know, fired his imagination, while he was eager to improve the condition of the people. He entered the House of Lords in order to contribute his part to the moulding of the Empire. He never could have entered the popular House; and it would give a new meaning to the Upper House if one could think of it containing the greatest minds which the country has produced, men who after years of service in their several departments of life, honoured and recognised, devote their experience of affairs and the maturity of their thought to the government of the country to which they owe everything, and to which they can in this way make some return.

It is impossible to do justice to Tennyson's acceptance of the peerage without noticing the seriousness with which he took his legislative duties and his earnest consideration of the signs of the times and of the

needs of the people. He sat on the cross benches, for he was not there to support any Party; but he wished to give practical effect to those lofty counsels of national life and policy to which he had given utterance for forty years.

If anyone could suppose that this dignity affected in any way his sympathy with the people, or his simple and natural communion with the poor, there is a two-fold refutation in the circumstances which accompanied his elevation. "The affectionate remembrances of good old Susan Epton," an old servant of his mother's, he said, "and her sister touched me more than all the congratulations. I am grieved that the former is stone blind." And on March 21st, 1884, about a fortnight after he took his seat in the House of Lords, he wrote to an old blind Sheffield blacksmith: "I should have a heart harder than your anvil if I were not deeply interested in what you tell me. I thank you for your pretty verses. The spirit which inspires them should give the lesson of cheerful resignation and thankfulness and faith to all. Being able to do this by writing such verses you will always have work of the noblest and best to do. Accept from me my best wishes and believe me truly yours, Tennyson."

In November he published in *Macmillan*, what may be regarded as his political creed. He was in the House of Lords to realise his dream—

Of Knowledge fusing class with class,  
 Of civic Hate no more to be,  
 Of Love to leaven all the mass,  
 Till every soul be free.

In July he voted for the extension of the Franchise, though he wrote most earnestly to his friend Gladstone, urging him to give the Lords the promise of a Redistribution Bill, in introducing the Bill for extension. "If you solemnly pledge yourselves," he wrote, "that the Extension Bill shall not become law before redistribution has been satisfactorily settled, I am quite willing to vote with you, and in proof I come up to town notwithstanding gout." His lines to Gladstone in November are perhaps a unique example of the poet's gift introduced, not in appeal to the people, but as an earnest personal warning to the responsible head of affairs :

Steersman, be not precipitate in thine act  
 Of steering, for the river here, my friend,  
 Parts in two channels, moving to one end—  
 This goes straight forward to the cataract :  
 That streams about the bend ;  
 But though the cataract seem the nearer way,  
 Whate'er the crowd on either bank may say,  
 Take thou the bend, 'twill save thee many a day.

The Franchise Bill was read a second time without a division.

Unfortunately the Home Rule Question, which tore the Liberal party in twain, separated the two

old friends. Tennyson was "heart and soul a Unionist," and like almost all the creations of Mr Gladstone in the peerage, found himself committed to vote against his creator. But he was keenly interested in other public movements, for instance, in the establishment of the Gordon homes for boys, and in the agricultural movement which aimed at securing land for the labourers. When Mr Arnold White made the attempt to take out some selected labourers to settle in South Africa, the settlement was, with the poet's approval, called the Tennyson Colony.<sup>1</sup> His heart beat in harmony with every effort made for the welfare of the people, though he dreaded nothing more than the babble of demagogues :

Men loud against all forms of power,  
Unfurnished brows, tempestuous tongues,  
Expecting all things in an hour,  
Brass mouth and iron lungs.

He was opposed to disestablishment. It would, he thought, "prelude the downfall of much that is greatest and best in England." But he was entirely free from that arrogance and social scorn which a religious establishment appears to foster. And when one day in 1886 he came across, in Fresh-

<sup>1</sup> This practical work is so interesting that an Appendix is added from the pen of Mr White describing Lord Tennyson's connection with it.

water, the dead body of Isaac Porter, a Methodist preacher, who had fallen dead on his way to chapel, he wrote to the relatives: "I cannot but look on his death as a happy one; sudden, painless, while he was on his way to his chapel, to render thanks and praise to his Maker. Our liturgy prays against sudden death; but I myself could pray for such a sudden death as Isaac Porter's." Like all the best and noblest in England he was incapable of entering into that narrow spirit which arbitrarily declares one form of church organisation essential and divine. Tennyson's largeness of vision and the strength of his own spiritual life, saved him from that contracted exclusiveness.

Even in times of illness he talked politics with his doctor. Under the depressing effects of influenza in 1890 he would hear the new Tithes Bill read, and was full of admiration of the graduated property-tax in Victoria, which he saw must ultimately come in England. He eagerly welcomed the idea of Australian Federation; and he wrote to Sir Henry Parkes rejoicing in the courage with which he had met the Australian strikes of 1890. "Is there no hope of arbitration by mixed tribunals, governments having first distinctly shown a bold front against any attempt at illegal intimidation?"

It will be seen, then, that the acceptance of the peerage was not in the least a concession to that

supposed weakness of a population that dearly loves a peer ; but it was a wish on the part of one who had spent a long life in thought and in study, to take a little part in the government of the great country which he had always passionately loved, and by his noble verse had in no small degree contributed to make.

And yet this active contact with the tide of national affairs was not allowed to hinder his own inward thought or the assiduous work at his craft as a poet. Of this, evidence was given in that spirited and profound poem, called *Vastness*, which appeared in the *March Macmillan*, 1887. In a brilliant survey of human activities and interests—which for rapidity and trenchancy of utterance he had never surpassed in his youth—he works up to the fine conclusion :

What is it all, if we all of us end in being our own corpse  
coffins at last,  
Swallowed in vastness, lost in silence, drowned in the deeps of  
a meaningless past?  
What but a murmur of gnats in the gloom, or a moment's anger  
of bees in their hive?  
Peace, let it be, for I loved him and love him for ever, the dead  
are not dead but alive.

At the end of 1885 appeared the volume *Tiresias and other Poems*. It was a very wonderful production for a man of seventy-six, and it contains several things which are in the nature of self-revelation. He said that the passages on Faith and on the Passion

of the Past in *The Ancient Sage* were of this personal character, but indeed the whole utterance of the Ancient Sage was that of Tennyson, the old man rebuking the flippancy and shallow scepticism of the young :

My son,  
 Thou canst not prove that I, who speak with thee,  
 Am not thyself in converse with thyself,  
 For nothing worthy proving can be proven,  
 Nor yet disproven ; wherefore thou be wise,  
 Cleave ever to the sunnier side of doubt,  
 And cling to Faith beyond the forms of Faith !

And the poet lets us into the secret of his life in these words :

And more—think well ! Do well will follow thought,  
 And in the fatal sequence of this world  
 An evil thought may soil thy children's blood.

And climb the Mount of Blessing, whence, if thou  
 Look higher, then, perchance, thou mayest, beyond  
 A hundred ever rising mountain lines,  
 And past the range of night and shadow, see  
 The high heaven dawn of more than mortal day  
 Strike on the Mount of Vision.

In *The Dead Prophet* the poet uttered his *caveat* against the ways of biographers. He warmly protested against the modern habit of prying into the privacies and faults of our great teachers, under the plea of truth, or of reverence for the dead. This false reverence, called in heaven "The Curse of the Prophet," is depicted at her work :



She tore the prophet after death,  
And the people paid her well.

The poet's stainless life gave no opportunity for this unwholesome prurience in his own case, but he has thrown his ægis over others who, without his exalted and unfaltering life have yet been the teachers of mankind.

The poem *To Virgil* written for the Mantuans on the nineteenth century of Virgil's death, is autobiographical in another sense; his passionate admiration of the Roman poet, even from his earliest days, as

Wielder of the stateliest measure ever moulded by the lips  
of man,

explains the principle and power of his own prosody. He learnt from Virgil the music of words, and also the magic of association, so that he also could give—

All the charm of all the Muses often flowering in a lonely  
word.

He once gave Virgil's *cunctantem ramum* as an illustration of this charm in a single word, but in this brief poem there are several examples of his own witchery in laying bare by an epithet a whole range of thoughts and feelings. Here, for instance, are three adjectives, each of which is an epitome of the early glories of the Golden Age, and of the glory that shall be;

Summers of the *snakeless* meadow, *unlaborious* earth and  
*oarless* sea.

It is this intense feeling for words, and the lord-

ship of language which makes the dedication of this volume the more touching: "To my good friend, Robert Browning, whose genius and geniality will best appreciate what may be best, and make most allowance for what may be worst, this volume is affectionately dedicated." Browning's disregard for the mere charm of language—"he seldom attempts" Tennyson said "the marriage of sense with sound, although he shows a spontaneous felicity in the adaptation of words to ideas and feelings,"—might easily have repelled the other poet's sensitive ear. But the noble appreciation of what is noble triumphed over all other considerations, and Tennyson profoundly appreciated the work which was, in all respects but its truth, unlike his own. There were two lines of Browning's which he said he wished he had written:

"The little more and how much it is,  
The little less and what worlds away."<sup>1</sup>

Browning fully appreciated this volume. "He spoke with great enthusiasm of the *Eastern* (sc. Ancient) *Sage*," writes Jowett, "and seemed to have caught the spirit. He is always generous and kind in what he says about Alfred." "I know that, being what you are," he wrote to Tennyson four years later, "there is no need to put in evidence the thorough love that I have always had for yourself,

<sup>1</sup> *By the Fireside.*

no less than my absolute admiration of your work." And on the eightieth birthday: "Let me say I associate myself with the universal pride of our country in your glory, and in its hope that for many a year we may have your very self among us: secure that your poetry will be a wonder and delight to all those who are appointed to come after; and for my own part let me further say, I have loved you dearly." Tennyson's reply to this outbreak of affection was this: "I thank you with my whole heart and being for your noble and affectionate letter, and with my whole heart and being I return your friendship."

It adds greatly to the message which the great poets delivered to their age, a message which might be summed up in the words, "scorn of scorn, love of love, and hate of hate," to find that in perfect magnanimity and unfretful appreciation of each other's genius, they both perfectly exhibited the love which they commended to the world as the aim and the secret of life.

At the end of 1886 Tennyson had another tale of work to deliver, which contained some stones of stumbling and rocks of offence. This was *Locksley Hall sixty years after*, *The Fleet*, and the *Promise of May*. The little volume was dedicated to his wife. The exhortation to keep up the Fleet as the condition of our national existence can be better

appreciated now than it was then; the poet had an almost prophetic insight into the facts of the world around him; for instance, this very year he observed that "the Chinese who lived on a very little, could imitate everything, had no fear of death, would not long hence under good leadership be a great power in the world," a remark which seemed to anticipate Charles Pearson's famous book, *National Life and Character*.

The *Promise of May*, being simply dramatic, had been quite misunderstood on its first appearance. But the new *Locksley Hall* was greatly misunderstood, because readers failed to notice that it was a dramatic monologue. It was thought that in these sombre and even fierce denunciations uttered by an old man who seemed completely disillusionised, the poet was speaking in his own person. And certainly it seemed a melancholy result of sixty years of life and labour. But, as the poet said, "There is not one touch of biography in it from beginning to end." It is a dramatic sequel; it represents what the young man of the first *Locksley Hall*, following his natural bent, would in the lapse of time become. So far from representing Tennyson himself, it shows Tennyson's intense reprobation of that type of cynical, selfish young manhood, which passes from the passions of blighted love to a withered senility and a loveless end. Such a

man sees only the festering sores of his time, and can always find food for railing. The sorrows of the poor are not the occasion for seeking to help them, but for bitter denunciations of the age—without noticing that he, as much as any, goes to make the age which he denounces.

And yet there is one decided touch of the poet's own convictions in this dramatic monologue. It is in the dread of "babble," the endless talk, especially of self-interested persons, who use their tongues to serve their own purposes and to mislead their fellow-creatures. He had a curious old-world dread of the demagogue, and would have had a certain sympathy with the schoolboy who, confusing the word with demijohn, defined it as "a vessel with a spout, half full of drink." And though he had nothing of the bitterness which he expresses in the person of his drama, he had at this time grave forebodings; he felt sometimes that signs of decadence were apparent, that a day of evil was approaching, and that his own work had been ineffectual. "Evil must come upon us headlong," he would say, "if morality tries to get on without religion. . . . When I see society vicious and the poor starving in great cities, I feel that it is a mighty wave of evil passing over the world, but that there will be yet some new and strange development, which I shall not live to see. . . . You must

not be surprised at anything which comes to pass in the next fifty years. All ages are ages of transition, but this is an awful moment of transition. It seems to me as if there were much less of the old reverence and chivalrous feeling in the world than there used to be. I am old and I may be wrong, for this generation has assuredly some spirit of chivalry. . . . I tried in my *Idylls* to teach men these things and the need of the Ideal. But I feel sometimes as if my life had been a very useless life."

But no temporary depression stayed his hand : he worked with unabated vigour, and in April 1887 appeared the *Jubilee Ode*, which disappointed the public ; and in May *Demeter* was written, which was to give the name to the last volume but one of his poems. He was eagerly interested in the co-operative movement. He revisited Cornwall, and the old memories and visions of the *Idylls* came upon him, giving some delicious sense of finding again a first love. He visited his elder brother Frederick at St Heliers, and tried to wean him from Spiritualism. Frederick told Alfred, as they parted, that "not for twenty years had he spent such a happy day." He was full of encouragement and love to Walt Whitman, for his own sake and for the sake of the American Commonwealth which he represented and expressed ; he sends "New Year's greetings on the wings of this East Wind, which I trust is blowing softlier and

warmlier on your good grey head than here, where it is rocking the elms and ilexes of my Isle of Wight garden"; and, "Truly the mother country may feel that, how much soever the daughter owes to her, she, the mother, has nevertheless something to learn from the daughter. Especially I would note the care taken to guard a noble Constitution from rash and unwise innovators." The vigour and buoyancy of his bearing at this time are recorded by one who had the privilege of sharing his walks: "Though nearer eighty than seventy, his step was so rapid, he moved so briskly, that it was with difficulty I kept up with him. The last twenty minutes of the two hours generally ended in a kind of trot. Weather never interrupted his exercise. He scorned an umbrella. With his long dark mantle and thick boots, he defied all storms. When his large-brimmed hat became heavy with water, he would stop and give it a great shake, saying, 'How much better this is than to be huddled over the fire for fear of a little weather.'" This daring defiance of the elements, however, brought on an attack of rheumatic gout at the end of 1888, and for nine months he had to pass through the ordeal of a painful illness. Such an opportunity is the test and confirmation of the soul. He was perfectly patient and full of humour. "Looking out on the great landscape" at Farringford, he said "he had wonderful thoughts about God and the universe, and

felt as if looking into the other world." The beloved wife was constantly with him. Strange dreams came to him of woods and cliffs and temples. Now he was visiting all the ships of the fleet; now he was the Pope of the world, and bore on his shoulders all its sins and miseries.

The first day he came down he was full of *Job*, and wished them to read to him the passage in St John's Epistle, "Little children, love one another," and the Sermon on the Mount. All this suggests the pastures which he had visited in the time of illness. There was also that other comfort of illness, the revelation of the hearts of friends, and the glimpse into what will be felt when the final separation comes. Thus Jowett wrote: "Those who have been his friends will always think of him with love and admiration, and speak to others of the honour of having known him. He who has such record of life should have the comfort of it in the late years of it: there may be some things which he blames, and some which he laments, but as a whole he has led a true and noble life, and he need not trouble himself about small matters. He may be thankful for the great gift which he has received, and that he can return an account of it. It seems to me that he may naturally dwell on such thoughts at this time, although also, like a Christian, feeling that he is an unprofitable servant, and that he trusts only in the mercy of God."



As the spring of 1889 came he grew better. He worked at his poem *By an Evolutionist*; and he produced that exquisite *Throstle*, which contains the very heart of the spring. "Hope is the kiss of the future," he said, and it seemed as if this kiss was on his brow.

'Here again, here, here, here, happy year !'  
 O warble unchidden, unbidden ;  
 Summer is coming, is coming, my dear,  
 And all the winters are hidden.

In April he sat again in Maiden's Croft, and enjoyed to the full the primroses, cowslips, and the "ruddy-hearted blossom flake" of the elm, and the turtle-doves purring in the garden. By May Sir Andrew Clarke pronounced him well, and he went for a cruise in Lord Brassey's *Sunbeam*.

And thus his eightieth birthday came round, Aug. 6, 1889, finding him full of vigour and joy. Congratulations poured in ; some letters of adulation filled him with misery ; others of sincere love were welcomed with delight. "I don't know what I have done," he said on reading a beautiful letter from Edmund Lushington "to make people feel like that towards me, except that I have always kept my faith in immortality." That, if not the only, was a sufficient reason. There is no service that a man can render to a world in which all die than to hold fast the confidence that death is not the end. He was hard at work on the second part of *Ænone*, and felt that some of the lines

were [as good as any in the early poem. He had learnt the great art of working without too much concern about the talk of men. "As a general rule," he wrote to Dr Van Dyke, one of his best interpreters, "I think it wisest in a man to do his work in the world as quietly and as well as he can without much heeding the praise or the dispraise."

In December of this year, 1889, came out *Demeter and other Poems*. This volume is the fitting close to a great career. In rhythm and strength and the command of diction it shows no decline from the palmy days. It is a final sweep of the strings of the lyre, the whole gamut of the lyre, which the poet had sounded now for nearly seventy years.

The pathetic lines to Lord Dufferin are a new, brief *In Memoriam* for Lionel. The *Jubilee Ode* is the latest offering of the official Laureate; and it was only the excitement of the moment which failed to recognise the beauty and dignity of the lines ending with—

Are there thunders moaning in the distance?  
Are there spectres moving in the darkness?  
Trust the Hand of Light will lead her people.

The *Demeter* itself carries us back to the early studies in the Greek myths, *Ulysses*, *Tithonus*, *Ænone*. And *Owd Roa* shows that the Lincolnshire dialect is all alive in the heart of the old man as it was in the ears of the boy. *The Ring* recalls in its easy prosody and moving story, the earlier English

Idylls; and it contains lines which the poet used to quote as his own faith:

The veil

Is rending, and the Voices of the day  
 Are heard across the Voices of the dark.  
 No sudden heaven, nor sudden hell, for man,  
 But through the Will of One who knows and rules—  
 And utter knowledge is but utter love—  
 Æonian evolution, swift or slow,  
 Through all the Spheres, an ever opening height,  
 An ever lessening earth.

Other poems in this wonderful volume showed that the old power and the old music were still at command. But there were two or three pieces which could only come from an old man, and, in such a form and with such melodies, only from one who had lived as the poet had lived. *By an Evolutionist* was written in the intervals of illness as he was entering the eightieth year, and the last lines are a confession:

I have climbed to the snows of Age, and I gaze at a field in  
 the Past,  
 Where I sank with the body at times in the sloughs of a low  
 desire,  
 But I hear no yelp of the beast, and the Man is quiet at last,  
 As he stands on the heights of his life with a glimpse of a  
 height that is higher.

It was from those "heights of his life" that he wrote *Merlin and the Gleam*, that thread of autobiography which has guided our study from the beginning, and *The Oak*, clean cut like a Greek

epigram, which exactly reflects how he had lived his own life, ending in "naked strength." And then there was that little poem, composed one day in a journey between Aldworth and Farringford, which sounded all through England, as the evening bell announcing the return of the great spirit of her poet to the deep from which he came. "Mind you put *Crossing the Bar* at the end of all editions of my poems," he said. Though another little volume was yet to appear, this exquisite song of hope and undying vision, and of faith in the Unseen Pilot, was the sound which the poet wished to leave in the ear of his countrymen for ever.

It was a strange and beautiful coincidence that on the day when this volume of poems appeared, Browning crossed the Bar, receiving on his death-bed his own volume of *Asolando* with his own dying confession :

"No, at noonday in the bustle of man's work time  
Greet the unseen with a cheer !  
Bid him forward, breast and back as either should be,  
' Strive and thrive ! ' cry ' Speed,—fight on, fare ever  
There as here ! ' "

The two friends had loved each other in life, in death they were not far divided. They left the world with the same song, though set to a different music, on their lips.

Tennyson had still three years of this wonderful old

age, luminous like a September day. His strength did not fail him. He began, at Watts' advice, to make water-colour sketches and to carve in wood. He watched the birds along the cliffs, he searched the seaweeds in the pools when the tides were down, or lingered with delight on the sunsets when the tide was high, just as he had done all through the long years. He was deeply moved by the coal strike of 1889, afraid lest it should increase the price of coal for the poor, starve the industries, and drive trade out of the country. But he had the high spirits of youth. He would spring from a low chair, without using his hands, twenty times running, and defy his friend to do the same. He could even dance in sheer gaiety of heart.

And though he suffered from the influenza epidemic at the beginning of 1890, he was eagerly interested in all public questions still, and rejoiced to hear of one soul at least comforted and helped in the hour of death by *Crossing the Bar*. From first to last it was his great joy to "be of use to anyone."

On June 13th, 1890, he celebrated his fortieth wedding day, and was very bright, presenting his wife with a nosegay of roses, rosemary and syringa. Ten days later he was at Aldworth, working at his new Lincolnshire poem *The Churchwarden*, and laughing heartily at the humorous passages as he made them.

In one respect, by the goodness of God, he differed from the Arthur of his *Idylls*; his sun was not going down in storm, but in an amazing tranquillity. Out of the great deep he like Arthur had come, and had wrought for his long day of life; but he was to return to the great deep with the joy of work and of achievement still upon him, mellowed by sorrows, but clasped about with loves and delights, carrying in his aspect, for entrance into the other life in which he so confidently believed, the air of a labourer who can still labour, or of a warrior, whose sword is not sheathed, nor his hope of victorious battle extinguished.

## Chapter IX

### The Passing, 1892

“Not of the sunlight,  
Not of the moonlight,  
Not of the starlight !  
O young Mariner,  
Down to the haven,  
Call your companions,  
Launch your vessel ;  
And crowd your canvas,  
And, ere it vanishes  
Over the margin,  
After it, follow it,  
Follow the Gleam.”

IT was given to Tennyson to carry into the shadows of death, not only the belief in immortality, but a certain objective illustration of immortality which struck all observers. His death was not the end ; it seemed obviously not to be the end. He came down to the shore to embark with great schemes in hand, with unbroken serenity, with a face turned towards an unknown, but an unquestioned, future. His life and his work were not a greater gift to the world than his death and the manner of it. Throughout 1891 he seemed in the enjoyment of a robust old age which had in it no menace of the end. “To

those who love," said a friend of this time, "such old age in fact appears as if already immortal." He had in mind many designs for future poems; one on the unity of religions, which came to the light in *Akbar's Dream*; another on the Egyptian legends which describe how despair and death come on one who tries to probe the secret of the universe; another on the splendid conduct of Captain Pendleton of the *Cleopatra* who would not hoist colours of distress, feeling it wrong to imperil other lives in a hopeless attempt to rescue him, but was saved by the Liverpool steamer *Lord Gough* near St George's shoal; another on the story of St Perpetua; another on the death of Savonarola. He had great desires to know more of astronomy and botany, though it is said that in his poems there is no blunder on these intricate subjects; he always cherished the wish to see the tropics. He was still Ulysses, beating onward to untraversed seas, and dreamed of shores. His enjoyment in nature, notwithstanding the impaired sight, seemed unimpaired. During the tour in Devonshire he saw some tawny cows cooling themselves in midstream, a green meadow on one side, on the other a wooded slope. "If it were only to see this," he said, "the journey is worth while." He spent his birthday, August 6th, at Aldworth—"I always," he said, "pass my own birthday over in silence,"—quietly talking over old days with Aubrey



de Vere. Often during the summer he sat with wife and son on the heather at the top of Blackdown enjoying the tranquil sunsets. As from a calm height he saluted the splendid close of a "laborious day. Jowett's wish that he should write some great Christian hymns was not realised, but the hymns seemed to be chanting themselves in his spirit, and found a faint expression in his last poems. And with a beautiful generosity, which was characteristic of him, he seemed to lay hands on the younger poets who would have to stand in his room presently; he hailed in William Watson "the voice of a poet and of a patriot," and gaily replied to the comparison which the younger writer had made to his "wintry hair": "if you allude to a tree whose leaves are half gone you are right, but if you mean 'white' you are wrong, for I never had a grey hair on my head." He was pleased with Mr Rudyard Kipling's *English Flag*, and even more pleased with the gallant answer to his commendation: "When the private in the ranks is praised by the general he cannot presume to thank him, but he fights the better next day." And thus up to the closing year there was that activity, that expectation, that serenity, which illustrates Browning's great thought that "Man has For Ever."

But in January 1892, in reading *The Lotus Eaters* and the *Ode on the Duke of Wellington*, to Dr Hubert

Parry, that the composer might set them to music with the poet's own intonation, as it were, his voice for the first time failed. There was no sudden decline, but he accepted the warning. "I cannot," he replied, when he was asked to write on this or that topic, "I must write what I am thinking about, and I have not much time." In that month the young Duke of Clarence, the heir to the throne, who was just about to be married, died. Tennyson wrote to his beloved and revered Sovereign—and it is one of the most beautiful of the letters in that frank, affectionate correspondence between the Queen and her poet—"I know that your Majesty has a perfect trust in the Love and Wisdom which order the circumstances of our life, and in this alone is there comfort." He enclosed those touching lines which the Queen "spoke of with tears in her eyes," the last in the last of his volumes :

The face of Death is toward the Sun of Life,  
His shadow darkens earth ; his truer name  
Is Onward, no discordance in the roll  
And march of that Eternal Harmony  
Whereto the worlds beat time, tho' faintly heard  
Until the great Hereafter.

This little poem of seventeen lines took two days to write, but the strain told on him severely. He thought Watts would make a fine picture of the lines—

The face of Death is toward the Sun of Life,  
His shadow darkens earth.

In reality he himself was making a picture of it; with extraordinary tranquillity and a kind of solemn gladness he was almost wistfully turning to the Hereafter; the shadow of the approaching end fell on the happy home. In his walks he would sit and rest half way, gazing up at the drifting clouds, or down at the blue sea, noting the song of the birds, and the insects and the flowers. Still, as when he was a boy, the verses came naturally to him :

Spurge, with fiery crescent set,  
Like the flower of Mahomet,

he said, looking at the little flower. One day his son and constant companion heard him murmur :

The wan moon is setting behind the white wave,  
And time is setting for me, oh !

In March he recovered his voice; and on the 25th of that month he had the joy of hearing that *The Foresters* was attracting crowded audiences in New York, and the still greater joy of hearing from the principal actress, that to play the part of 'Maid Marian' was to her a spiritual benediction: "While I am playing the part I feel all its beauty and simplicity and sweetness, which make me feel for the time a happier and a better woman."

In June came another testimony of the world-wide influence which his poetry had exercised. An Eng-

lishman in Japan had met with an old Japanese poet who had copied out stanzas of *In Memoriam* and now asked him to read them. When he had read them the old poet thanked him and said that though he did not know the words the music spoke to him, and he knew he felt as the poet felt when he wrote the poem, for the music talked in a tongue that could not be mistaken, and he knew the poems were very beautiful. "We talk to each other across the world," he added.

All through the spring and early summer the old man's enjoyment of nature seemed as vivid as ever. He was able to cross over to the Channel Islands and to see once more his elder brother Frederick; and his mellow sympathy was shown when attention was called to the Salvationists shouting in the streets; he instantly quoted :

"For modes of faith let graceless zealots fight  
He can't be wrong whose life is in the right."

Then followed the last days at Farringford, the happy home of forty years. He had watched tenderly the unfolding of the pear and apple blossoms, of the white lilacs, and of the giant fig-tree, and he had disputed Emerson's saying—"Only to youth the Spring is Spring." "For Age does feel the joy of Spring," he said, "though age can only crawl over the bridge while youth skips the brook." His talk had all the charm of early days; it was grave

and gay by turns, full of inexhaustible anecdotes, illustrating each subject that came up, constantly plunging deep into the mysteries of life and of the universe, when his face shone and the language glowed with inspiration. No one could correctly record conversation, which did not, like Johnson's, consist in wit and epigram, nor, like Coleridge's, in strong philosophical monologue, but went on with a perfect spontaneity and naturalness, broken by long pauses, rising again on the tides of thought, always perfectly direct, expressed in the most concise and accurate language, the exact utterance of a soul marked by a "great and formidable innocence." He was able to read aloud again; and some favoured visitor heard him roll out his favourite *Maud* with a voice melodious and full of change, entering into the passion of the wonderful lyrics as if he had just composed them. The same visitor records: "I had never seen Lord Tennyson until this day. I think his greatest charm lay in his unworldliness and sincerity, in his tenderness and strong simplicity, and in a youthfulness which age could not destroy." He seemed perfectly placed in a perfect home at unity with itself. He recalled a characteristic conversation with Carlyle, when the subject had been personal immortality. "Eh! old Jewish rags," said Carlyle, "you must clear your mind of all that. Why should we expect a hereafter? Your traveller comes to an inn, and he

takes his bed, it's only for one night, he leaves next day, and another takes his bed, it's only for a night, he leaves next day, and another man takes his place and sleeps in the bed that he has vacated." Tennyson had replied, "Your traveller comes to his inn, lies down in his bed, and leaves the inn in the morning and goes on his way rejoicing, with the sure and certain hope and belief that he is going somewhere, where he will sleep the next night." There was small doubt in the "Spirit nearing yon dark Portal at the limit of his human state"; no fear about the

Hidden purpose of that Power which alone is great,  
Nor the myriad world, His shadow, nor the silent  
Opener of the Gate.

Just at the end of June, the day before leaving for Aldworth, a beautiful though unconscious farewell was said to Farringford, by the rector of Freshwater coming up to the study and administering the Communion to the family. Tennyson impressed upon the clergyman that he could only partake of it on the understanding that it was the simple memorial of the Saviour's dying love, and he quoted Cranmer from his own *Queen Mary*,

It is but a communion, not a mass,  
No sacrifice, but a life-giving feast.

This was the last act in that happy home.

On the last day of June the older home was exchanged for the newer, and at Aldworth, on the ridge overlooking the wide expanse of Sussex and Kent,

the last months were passed. In July he visited the Academy, but the crowd and heat were too much for him; still he would pay another visit to the Natural History Museum, to see his old friends the Ichthyosaurus, the Plesiosaurus and the Giant Sloth, and the beautiful groups of birds and their nests as they appear in nature. "I wish I could have seen this when I was a young man," he exclaimed.

Then came his last birthday on August 6. He was eighty-three. Happily some of his conversation on that day among his friends has been recorded. He quoted a fine passage from Milton, and was full of admiration of the line,

"Sonorous metal blowing martial sounds."

He quoted a passage of prose from de Quincey, "not poetry," he said, "but as fine as any verse." He gave it as his opinion that the finest English prose, apart from the Bible and the Prayer Book, is in Hooker, Bacon, Milton, Jeremy Taylor, de Quincey and Ruskin, and some of Sir Thomas Browne. He thought Bacon's essays contained more wisdom than any other volume of the same size; and he quoted with genuine delight: "It is a heaven upon earth when a man's mind rests on Providence, moves in Charity, and turns upon the poles of truth." These fragments of talk at the end are the best witness to the habits and principles of a lifetime, and certainly

show that the mind had lost none of its power. That it had lost none of its sympathy, is shown by his pleasure in receiving a birthday letter, written without grammar or spelling by a working man from Middlesborough; and also by the last letter and the last criticism on literature which came from him. The last letter, August 27, 1892, was to the Zemindar Bechari Lal: "I thank my young brother of the East for all the good wishes he sends to his old brother of the West, and I rejoice that he has sung in their common tongue (English) the praises of that great and good sovereign, to whom all her subjects owe such deep reverence and love. Accept every best wish (not forgetting the wish that practice may, as you say, make your verse perfect), and thanks too for your little books."

The latest criticism was on some poems sent to him by a stranger, which, though he was feeling ill, he looked through. He crossed out a despairing word of the writer "the end is failure," and said: "How can there be failure, if the divine speak through the human, be it through the voice of prince or peasant?"

He was at work, too, on another volume of poems. Though he was conscious that some of the wizard power was gone, he still had much to say. His language was that of the philosopher and of the Christian approaching the portal, rather than of the poet, but the slim last volume called the *Death of Ænone*,



*Akbar's Dream*, etc., is full of profound interest and of genuine teaching. In *Akbar's Dream*, under the Eastern garb, he expresses his own sense of the unity of the religious spirit, a unity which rests on the unity of God, and on the solidarity of man. The hymn with which it closes is not one that can be sung in churches, but it is a real glimpse into the aged poet's thought and aspiration. It is a hymn to the Sun :

Once again thou flamest heavenward, once again we see thee  
rise.

Every morning is thy birthday, gladdening human hearts and  
eyes,

Every morning here we greet it, bowing lowly down before  
thee,

Thee the Godlike, thee the changeless in thy everchanging  
skies.

Shadowmaker, shadowslayer, arrowing light from clime to  
clime,

How thy myriad laureates hail thee monarch in their wood-  
land rhyme,

Warble bird and open flower, and men, below the dome of  
azure,

Kneel adoring Him the Timeless in the flame that measures  
Time.

This was the language of the lover of nature, of the lover of the God behind nature. But *Charity* was the Christian speaking. The injured woman is nursed and blessed by the widow of the man who had really injured them both :

I had cursed her as woman and wife, and in wife and woman  
 I found  
 The tenderest Christ-like creature that ever stepped on the  
 ground.

Nowhere has he more simply, or with more spirit, expressed his creed, that Christianity is divine because it is the religion of pity, forgiveness and love. In the *Churchwarden and Curate* he showed that the old days of boyhood were still vivid, and the talk with which he was familiar then remained in his mind and in his heart; he read this poem, in spite of the cough which was constantly troubling him, with due justice to the Lincolnshire dialect, clearly as ever, and like all true humorists slyly enjoying his own fun. The last prose he wrote was the introduction to *Kapiolani*; and the last poem was *Whirl and follow the Sun*. The volume was also to contain that mysterious death-bed utterance, which seems to have been murmured, and to have been taken down by one who overheard, literally as he entered into the world beyond :

When the dumb hour, clothed in black,  
 Brings the dreams about my bed,  
 Call me not so often back,  
 Silent voices of the dead,  
 Toward the lowland ways behind me,  
 And the sunlight that is gone !  
 Call me rather, silent voices,  
 Forward to the starry track,  
 Glimmering up the heights beyond me  
 On, and always on !

It is curious to compare this spirit, nearing the dark portal, with that which is revealed in Amiel's Journal. The melancholy Swiss thinker flickers down like a candle in the socket; faith and hope seem to decay with the waning life. But our poet in the solemn shadows of death is eager, vivid, confident of a boundless future. His idea of heaven was "the perpetual ministry of one soul to another." Consequently up to the very last he was keenly interested in politics, which he regarded simply as the progressive working out of the good of the world. He talked with pride of the work England was doing in Egypt; he was anxious that the Old Age Pension scheme should be carried through. With no element of the party politician in him, he was one who lived in the life of his time and particularly in the life of his nation; and his saintliness was not an other-worldliness, simply because he did not recognise the line of death as a real line of demarcation. He felt we should fare onward, there as here.

If he disliked some of the features of the days in which his life closed; if he protested against the papers and the magazines "which pounce on everything that they can get hold of, and demoralise literature, giving an author no time to mature his works"; if it was the dread of his dying moments: "Oh, that Press will get hold of me now!" he yet had the most glowing confidence in the future. The

world would travel beyond the voices into peace ; there would be a parliament of man, a federation of the world. It was at present,—so he says in the latest volume,—only “red of the dawn,” “dawn, not day.”

We are far from the noon of man ; there is time for the race to grow.

The closing thoughts of life were buoyant, full of faith and hope as well as love. “Spirit seems to me to be the reality of the world.” “Vice sometimes appears to me as the shadow of idleness.” “I do not feel horror when I see sin and misery, but shame for the sake of God.” This wonderful remark is the revelation of a habit of mind. Ordinary men are indignant with sin and misery when they themselves are the victims. Men of a nobler type are indignant with the authors of suffering, and sometimes with God for allowing it, out of sympathy with those that suffer. But it argues a nature far advanced in the ways and thoughts of God to take this higher and truer view, and to feel a certain shame at the sight of those things which to the pure eyes of God are insupportable. That is, indeed, to become a fellow-sufferer with God. Beyond that it is hardly possible in this present life to go.

The last month had come. He began to long, and to express his longing, for the hereafter, when all would be made clear. He was surrounded with love and tenderness. The beloved wife was with him,

never better understood or more valued. "Yes, higher than I am," he once said to a friend in the twilight. "It is a tender, spiritual face, is it not?" he said to another friend with a deep and solemn voice, when she had just left the room, without mentioning her name. He had also the most devoted son, who literally sacrificed himself to be the attendant, the companion, the biographer, of his father. If there were spiteful natures that disliked him,—there was one who for forty-two years sent him an abusive letter on the appearance of each new volume,—and if, as he said, he hated spite more than he loved fame, these animosities had ceased to trouble him,—he was only "sorry for the man who had so much spite"; and approbation, admiration, and gratitude were round him on every side. But it was twilight and the evening bell; and one clear call had come to him. It was time to embark. He wished to go, like all the great spirits of the past, not to get quit of the present evil world, but to enter the world which is to come. On Sept. 29 he was so weak that Sir Andrew Clark was summoned. On that day he drove, for the last time, to Haslemere, and, pointing to his accustomed haunts, he said quietly, "I shall never walk there again." But he read that day Job and Matthew, and Miss Swanwick's *Poets as the Interpreters of the Age*, and when the great doctor arrived he discussed with him Gray's *Elegy*. Three days later he heard with

interest an article in the *Times* on the colonisation of Uganda, and expressed his hope that some day South Africa would be welded into one compact state, linked in a strict federation with England. For two days he was uneasy and drowsy; but on Monday morning, October 4, at eight o'clock, he sent for his Shakespeare, and he had in his hands his three favourite plays, *Lear*, *Cymbeline*, and *Troilus and Cressida*. He could not read more than two or three lines, and told his doctor that he should not get better; but when he was asked if he felt better he replied, "The doctor says I am." He knew quite well that he had come down to the great deep to depart, and he had all the composure and courtesy of a traveller who does not dread the voyage. His anxiety was lest he should trouble the nurses, and he was solicitous about his wife's health. In the evening, requesting his son to do something for him, he said touchingly, "I make a slave of you."

On Tuesday, the 5th, he was quite himself, but the dumb hour clothed in black brought the dreams about his bed. "Where is my Shakespeare?" he called. "I must have my Shakespeare." Again he said: "I want the blinds up; I want to see the sky and the light—the sky and the light,"<sup>1</sup> and he looked out over the weald and the downs bathed in the

<sup>1</sup> Goethe in dying cried: "Machen Sie das Fenster auf, damit Ich mehr Licht bekomme."

morning sun. In the afternoon he was pleased with a telegram from the Queen. In the evening, when the thermometer touched some nerve under his arm, he said that he had "a most beautiful vision of blue and other colours." Later on he asked: "Have I not been walking with Gladstone in the garden, and showing him my trees?" "No," said his son. He replied, "Are you sure?"

And now the last day had come—Wednesday, October 6. He asked whether his new book had arrived, and by a beautiful coincidence his son was able to put into his hands the proofs of *The Death of Ænone*. His work was completed, and he saw it with his eyes before they closed. But, having got the book in his hands, his request was for his Shakespeare again. "Hallam!" he called at 10.30, as his son was going to fetch his mother. "Are you free from pain?" asked his son. "Quite," he said; "but I shall not get better." At two o'clock he again asked for his Shakespeare, tried in vain to read it, and lay with his hand on the open page. Sir Andrew Clark had started at seven in the morning to be there that day. The dying man knew him. "I hope that you are not tired," he said with his usual kindness of heart. During the afternoon he occasionally opened his eyes and looked round; sometimes he spoke. "What a shadow this life is, and how men cling to what is after all but a small part of the great world's life!" He was

keenly interested in the story of a villager ninety years old who had been carried to his bed-ridden wife to say good-bye, had pressed her hand and said, "Come soon!" and then died. "True faith," said Tennyson, with tears in his voice. Suddenly he gathered himself together and put to the doctor a question in one word—"Death?" The doctor bowed his head. "That's well," was the dying man's reply. At a quarter to four he exclaimed, "I have opened it." Had he seen the "Silent Opener of the Gate"? Then he spoke a few last words of blessing to the beloved wife and son, who had come down with him to the shore of the great deep, with no murmurs of farewell, but with imperishable love and faith, to watch him embark.

When the words were spoken, a great peace fell upon the room; his patience and quiet strength gave tranquillity and endurance to the watchers. And a wonderful thing occurred: all his life he had felt a peculiar charm in moonlight effects; Mr Watts Dunton describes his delight in them as a passion; and now the full light of the October moon flooded the chamber through the oriel window. "On the bed a figure of breathing marble, in the light of the moon," wrote an eyewitness, "his hand clasping Shakespeare; the moonlight, the majestic figure as he lay there, 'drawing thicker breath,' irresistibly brought to our minds his own *Passing of Arthur*."



For three hours and a half that solemn and wonderful scene continued, wife and son, and son's wife watched, "thankful for the love and the utter peace of it all." And as the spirit passed, the son spoke over him his own prayer because he knew that he would have wished it:

"God accept him ! Christ receive him !"

It was not death ; it was the passing of one who had greatly believed in God and Immortality, had greatly and strenuously lived, had loved much and had been much loved, and who now "turned again home."

The body lay for five days, grand and majestic, perfect peace upon the unfurrowed brow. *Cymbeline* was by him, and he was adorned with wreaths of roses and laurel, laurel from Virgil's tomb.

All England was thrilled with the beauty and dignity of this end of a great life, and with the answer to the prayer uttered in *Crossing the Bar*. The dust of the great dead was of course laid in Westminster Abbey ; but the journey from Aldworth to the Abbey was in keeping with the simplicity and shy retirement of his character. The little family, the villagers and the school children, followed over the moor through the lane towards a glorious sunset, and then to Haslemere under brilliant starlight. From Waterloo station to the Abbey there was no gloomy pomp of a funeral ; but the honoured dead

was carried without observation and laid for the night in the chapel of St Faith.

On Wednesday, October 12th, his country paid the last meed of honour and love to its poet. The Abbey was crowded from end to end, and many were seen reading *In Memoriam*; the great consolation at his burial was his own great consolation to all who are bereaved; the poem which might well be in the house of mourning for ever, to point

Upon the last low verge of life  
The twilight of eternal day.

The nave was lined by the survivors of the Light Brigade whose heroism at Balaclava he had immortalised, by the London Riflemen whose patriotism he had fired, and by the boys of the Gordon Homes whose interests had been near to his heart ever since he had met Gordon.

The most distinguished men in England were proud to bear the pall: the Duke of Argyll, Lord Dufferin, Lord Selborne, Jowett, close personal friends, and Lord Rosebery, Mr Lecky, Froude, Lord Salisbury, the Master of Trinity, Dr Butler, Lord Kelvin, Sir James Paget, and the United States Minister. Two anthems were sung at the beautiful service of reverence and gratitude and praise, one, *Crossing the Bar*, set to music by Dr Bridge; the other, *Silent Voices*, which by the poet's own request his wife had set to a melody in F minor.

In the Abbey he was laid next to Robert Browning and in front of Chaucer's monument. And Woolner's bust is against the pillar near the grave. It was a singular providence that permitted Lady Tennyson to live just long enough to enable her son to collect the memoirs of her husband; and then just four years later, which brought her to his exact age, she followed him on August 10th, 1896. She was laid to rest in the quiet churchyard at Freshwater, where the one inscription unites the spirits and the lives which can never be divided.

In loving memory  
of

ALFRED LORD TENNYSON,  
Whose happiest days were passed at Farringford  
In this parish.  
Born August 6th, 1809.  
Died October 6th, 1892.

Buried in Westminster Abbey, October 12th, 1892.

Speak, living voice! with thee death is not death;  
Thy life outlives the life of dust and breath.

Also in loving memory  
of his wife

EMILY LADY TENNYSON,  
Born July 9th, 1813.  
Died August 10th, 1896.

Dear, near and true, no truer time himself  
Can prove you, though he make you evermore  
Dearer and nearer.

It has not come within the compass of this book to estimate Tennyson as a poet; the poems have only been touched so far as they show the man or so far as his life's work consisted in their production and his worth was to be judged by the manner in which he produced them. But in the review of the life which is inevitably suggested by that closing scene in the Abbey, there is one thought which comes unbidden. He was a teacher, the teacher of his age. Even though his poetry should not survive the crucial test of time, none the less his work was done, and done effectually. For nearly sixty years he held the ear of his country, at first doubtfully, but for the last forty years without dispute, the most widely read and the most profoundly honoured writer of the day. We need say nothing of the art which fascinated young and old alike, the beauty which ravished his own generation and inclined some contemporaries to think him the most perfect of English poets, but what concerns us here is, that the teaching from first to last was spiritual, religious. He did not write hymns or sermons, but his work did what hymns and sermons ought to do, only much more effectually; it was the medium of instruction to the spirit of man, the medium of praise to God.

The writer of *Theology in the English Poets* has complained that Tennyson was enough of a sceptic to give a support to the sceptics of our time; from his

poems may be quoted passages which justify doubt and discredit received dogmas. But such a criticism overlooks the fact that the undogmatic basis of the poet's teaching was precisely what gave it value; he went afresh to the primal springs of religion and virtue and truth in the human spirit; he built again the temple of God from the foundations. And if in this reconstruction of religion—which his age needed—he left aside dogmas which the Church accepted and taught, it yet remains to be proved whether these dogmas were truths or merely the creation of the dark ages, and a hindrance to a whole-hearted faith.

“There lives more faith in honest doubt,  
Believe me, than in half the creeds.”

This has often been considered a hard saying, but if we are to interpret it by his general attitude on religious questions there should not be much difficulty in understanding it; a creed is, in some respects, the antithesis of faith; accepted dogmatically without any vital assimilation it has no religious value; honest doubt is almost of necessity the first step in the vital assimilation of truth.

The man who accepts the creeds, or obeys the Church unquestioningly and irrationally, has not faith in the spiritual sense, but only credulity. It is by an accident if his faith differs from superstition. But that honest doubt which questions and demands that truth may prove itself to be true, while it casts

aside much which has been received, grasps that which is shown to be true with a living power. One who in this way wrestles with his doubt, and as the result of strenuous search, finds a nobler faith his own, may believe less, but his faith will be greater. It will be real faith and it will grow, like a grain of mustard seed. This was the truth which had to be taught to the nineteenth century. Tennyson taught it, and made it current coin, with such effect that after ages may fail to realise how that which has become to them commonplace was in him considered to be heterodoxy.

But the contention of this book has been that the greatness of Tennyson was not so much in his poetry, or even in his teaching, as in his character and his life. "The man was even greater than the work" was a conviction which forced itself on many who knew him. The life was great not for those brilliant qualities which extorted the gradual admiration of a reluctant world, but for those spiritual gifts which were always there, but not generally known until the memoir revealed them.

From boyhood to old age, from the time when the delighted children gathered around him to hear his endless stories, to the day when his devoted household waited hushed and awed around his dying bed, in the warm comradeship of youth, in the passionate love of manhood, in the hospitality of the happy

homes, his great characteristic was loveableness. His character was drawn on grand and simple lines; he was the easiest man in the world to understand, and yet the most inexhaustible to know. There was no duplicity, no fencing, no ambiguity. He uttered himself in a forthright fashion, with that absolute truthfulness which is among the rarest of human gifts, a truthfulness which is only found in the strongest and most fearless of natures and is apt at times to shock a puerile convention. What was in his mind he did not scruple to express, because he did not allow in his mind what he would have been ashamed to have upon his tongue.

But such utterance without afterthought, such transparent candour, could only be loveable on two conditions, that it was accompanied by complete humility and complete kindness.

"Your father," wrote the Duke of Argyll to the son, "was a man of the noblest humility I have ever known. It was not that he was unconscious of his own powers. It was not that he was indifferent to the appreciation of them by others. But it was that he was far more continually conscious of the limitations upon them in face of those problems of the universe, with which, in thought, he was habitually dealing." A preoccupation with the Infinite kept him humble. If it ever occurred to him that he was the most famous writer of his day, it did not affect

him, for he compared himself not with other writers but with the stellar spaces, the vast tracts of time, and the Eternal Spirit. If he expressed satisfaction with his own work or was pleased to read his own poems, everyone felt at once that this was the outcome not of pride but of humility. He was pleased with what he felt good in his work, because he was modest about the merit of it as a whole; and he read his poems because a noble simplicity forbade false modesty, he saw that the reading gave pleasure to others, as it did to him.

His sympathy with humble people, the great interest he had in human beings everywhere, gave dramatic life to his poetry. And it was this habit of taking men on the ground of their humanity rather than on that of the dignity and estimation which they enjoyed in the world which gave to his intercourse with the Queen that surprising combination of freedom and reverence. "Dear and honoured lady, my Queen," he wrote after his first visit to Osborne. . . . "I will not say that I am loyal or that your Majesty is gracious, for these are old hackneyed terms used or abused by every courtier, but I will say that during our conversation I felt the touch of that true friendship which binds human beings together whether they be kings or cobblers." It is a very profound humility which approaches kings and cobblers with the same reverence, because men



as men strike a certain awe into the soul, and stand revealed as the expression of the invisible God.

Out of such humility and reverence for human nature a consistent kindness naturally flows. "The longer I live," he wrote to the Queen, "the more I value kindness and simplicity among the sons and daughters of men." And what he valued he practised. "Tennyson's sweet-natured kindness," wrote a friend, "when he could give pleasure, down to the very last day and hour, I have never found exhaustible." The law of kindness was on his lips, and on his wife's lips, and the very servants in the house were influenced by that commanding law; they gave the impression of being "the kindest people one ever knew."

This was his true nobility. With this as the habitual temper of heart and mind he was able to utter himself strongly and none could misunderstand. "I hate scorn," he would say. "I hate" was often on his lips. It was the correlative of "I love." He hated heartily whatever injured love, whatever darkened, saddened or destroyed human life.

He was completely loveable, simple, sincere; and, living in the world of ideals, in the world of the Spirit, he drew all who knew him by the cords of love, by the bands of a man, into the same upper world.

And thus, without waiting for the verdict of posterity, we may say that his task was successfully

accomplished: with that task the fame and estimate of after days has but a secondary connection. Far back, in December 1847, Carlyle had met him and said of him: "A truly interesting Son of Earth and Son of Heaven—who has almost lost his way among the will-o'-the-wisps, I doubt; and may flounder ever deeper, over neck and nose, among the quagmires that abound. I like him well; but can do next to nothing for him. Milnes with general co-operation got him a pension; and he has bread and tobacco; but that is a poor outfit for such a soul. He wants a *task*; and, alas! that of spinning rhymes, and naming it 'Art' and 'high Art,' in a time like ours will never furnish him."<sup>1</sup> He did not lose his way among the will-o'-the-wisps, but found his task in his rhymes, because he made character and strenuous living the basis of his work. His utterance in verse, like Carlyle's in prose, was the sincere expression of a soul that lived what it taught before it attempted to teach.

His poems have been the delight and comfort of two generations; after generations, we may feel persuaded, will revert to them, and find again the virtue which resides in all true art, and earnest teaching. But it cannot be that the beauty and completeness of his life will be forgotten. Such a treasure no nation can afford to forget. Of that there must be an *In Memoriam*, and it must be woven of immortelles.

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondence of Carlyle and Emerson*, ii. 159.

In an interesting and picturesque park which slopes down to a broad estuary in the west there is a mausoleum which crowns the landscape, and draws the visitor from the curious study of the many species of pines to the discovery of a human interest which throws even the beauties of nature into the shade. The marble chamber within is furnished with the effigies of a husband and children who have been removed by death ; and, forming as it were an altar in the quiet chapel, there is a draped table, which bears a copy of *In Memoriam*. The comfort, the sorrow, the religion, the speculation of the poem lie there as the silent but eloquent utterance of the soul in the presence of death and bereavement.

We may perhaps cherish the hope that even if *In Memoriam*, speaking the language and using the arguments of its time, should in after years lose its power to reassure and to console, this other *In Memoriam* of the poet's life may yet avail. The strong, brave, tender spirit from the past will be with those who mourn, or doubt, or are perplexed. The memory of one who writing poems was himself a poem, who living in an age of doubt fought the spectres of the mind and laid them, who holding fast to Christ found that power was with him in the night, who manful and even Titanic was yet humble and tender, diligently carrying out the mission of his life, will come as a constant encouragement to live greatly in faith

and hope and love, believing that the greatest of these is love.

That noble spirit, by the manner of its passing, forbade the thought of death, and gave the world even in life glimpses of the portal which through death opens upon life.

And we may best close our study with that extraordinary experience which came to him at times during life, but is now, we may believe, habitual. He told Tyndall, on their first meeting, of a state of consciousness into which he could throw himself by thinking intently on his own name. It was an isolation of the spirit from the body; not a loss of consciousness, but an intenser consciousness, in which he was able to range at will in the world of the spirit. In the poem called *The Ancient Sage* Tyndall found this experience described—but it had been hinted at in *The Princess*—and it gives a clue to the psychology of a great mind :

More than once when I  
Sat all alone, revolving in myself  
The word that is the symbol of myself,  
The mortal limit of the Self was loosed,  
And passed into the Nameless, as a cloud  
Melts into Heaven. I touched my limbs, the limbs  
Were strange, not mine—and yet no shade of doubt  
But utter clearness, and through loss of self  
The gain of such large life as matched with ours  
Were sun to spark—unshadowable in words,  
Themselves but shadows of a shadow world.

It is possible that, like St Paul caught up into the third heavens and allowed to see things which he was not allowed to relate, this poet, whose mission to the world was to convince it of the after life, was thus carried through the gates, which are not really of death, but of life. Death itself may be for the spirits that are in God just such a transition—

The gain of such large life as matched with ours  
Were sun to spark.

May it be given to us, if not in the abnormal experiences of life, yet in the normal operation of death, to pass through the mystic gates into the Nameless, and to return to that spiritual Deep from which we also come!



## APPENDIX

### THE TENNYSON COLONY

By ARNOLD WHITE

My recollections of Lord Tennyson in connection with the South African Colonisation Scheme date from the early spring of 1887. On February 14th of that year I received a letter from Mr Hallam (now Lord) Tennyson asking me to come down to Farringford and speak to the Isle of Wight young men on the advantages of emigrating. I went down, and after the village meeting had the opportunity of explaining the scheme to the great man. He listened with the greatest interest and attention, and from that time forward was strenuous in helping forward the good work.

Lord Tennyson's reluctance to write letters in his later years is notorious, but on March 10th, 1887 he wrote me two letters. The first, which refers to the national waste of our neglected children in the great city, is as follows:—

FARRINGFORD, FRESHWATER,  
ISLE OF WIGHT, *March 10th, 1887.*

*To* ARNOLD WHITE,

I hear with great interest of the voluntary efforts made on behalf of the eighty thousand

children leaving the London Board Schools every year: as they are the parents of the coming generation I wish that those who care for the future of the country would help the work by every means in their power.

TENNYSON.

The Colonisation Scheme upon which I was then engaged, and which now, after the lapse of many years, bids fair to be tried on national lines, is blessed by Lord Tennyson thus:—

FARRINGFORD, FRESHWATER,  
ISLE OF WIGHT, *March 10th, 1887.*

DEAR MR WHITE,

It seems to me that in South Africa loyal men and women of English blood are greatly needed. The advantage of sending thither those who cannot gain bread and meat for their children in this country however hard they work is so great that I shall be glad to know that the Government are taking active steps to organise a wide system of judicious colonisation.

Faithfully Yours,

TENNYSON.

If Lord Tennyson's advice and wishes had been followed by the Government of the day in 1887 there would have been no war in 1899. The scheme which commended itself to the late Lord Tennyson was, roughly speaking,



the application of the county territorial system to national colonisation. On my first visit to the Cape in 1885, when I was the guest of Sir Charles Warren during his Bechuana expedition, the prospects of a collision between the Dutch and English races seemed to be already assured. The idea therefore evolved was that the unemployed labour, which in the eighties, constituted a national danger in Great Britain, if planted out judiciously in South Africa would prevent the coming war, and by equalising them amalgamate the two white races. The manner in which this proposal was to be carried out was to establish a series of African settlements of about 6000 or 7000 acres each, each settlement to be in connection with, and supported by, an English county. The late Viscountess Ossington provided the money for the experiment, and after a preliminary failure in the Wolseley Colony, near King Williamstown, a Hampshire settlement was founded, which bore Lord Tennyson's name, on the Carnarvon estate of the Messrs Halse in the Wodehouse District of the Cape Colony. During the late war Tennyson was often referred to by the correspondents with General Gatacre and the name Tennyson is perpetuated on the military map. I think, but I am not sure, that the Carnarvon Farm station on the Indwe and Sterkstroom line bears the name of Tennyson.

The idea with which the settlement was founded was not to provide a permanent home for the settlers, but simply to serve as an asylum or harbour of refuge whereby well-conducted but needy Hampshire men could

acquire a knowledge of Colonial agriculture and habits, and support themselves, until able to rise later on into a better position. With the exception of one family, which returned home, everyone who went out in connection with the Tennyson Settlement has, I believe, not only succeeded in life, but is occupying a much better position than was possible in England. I received two or three months ago from one of the original Tennyson settlers a letter of which the following is an extract :—" I sympathise and understand your feelings in regard to the stoppage of immigration to Tennyson. It ought to have been a success, but I think you may take a great measure of comfort to your heart in the fact that the whole of those families, who in the first place knew little or nothing of farming, have found employment on the railway and at various trades, and to-day, without exception, are in a much better position than they would have been in England."

This particular family have succeeded well and occupy a farm of considerable extent in the neighbourhood of the Tennyson Settlement. The sons of this settler have fought for their Queen and country in the recent war. Another ex-settler, who has also succeeded, was severely wounded in one of the recent engagements near Ladybrand.

The settlement consisted of five and twenty cottages, a schoolhouse, which also served as a church ; it was provided with a chaplain, a schoolmistress for the children, who was also a trained nurse ; the English flag was hoisted every morning ; alcoholic liquor was excluded, and some

simple regulations, suggested by experience, rendered the working of the settlement comparatively easy at the time when I relinquished personal control of the scheme. Owing to Lady Ossington's death and other causes the work came to an end, and the land on which the cottages were built relapsed to the original owners who utilised it as a Dutch settlement. There is, however, little doubt that the plan which attracted Lord Tennyson's sympathy and support will now be resumed by Government and its continuance assured by the establishment of permanent arrangements.

Lord Tennyson took the keenest interest in the details and organisation. The association of his name with the scheme naturally drew upon him communications from would-be immigrants, not only from Hampshire, but from all parts of the kingdom. Owing to his personal desire, strongly and repeatedly expressed, an Irish family was included in the Hampshire settlement. Lord Tennyson's interest in the Colonisation scheme, which he has referred to in his letter, seemed to be based upon a profound and ever present love of country. His reverence and admiration for General Gordon were in strict relation to this love of country. The word "patriotism" is so much misused and sullied by modern jingoism that one hesitates to use the word even in connection with a great poet and a leader of thought. Lord Tennyson however, was a patriot if ever there were one, because he was not only patriotic but the cause of patriotism in others. Pure patriotism and interest in the one political problem

of the century, namely, the Condition of the People, induced him to lend the weight of his name to the colonisation experiments ; and though in their original form they have passed away, it is certain that the measures he advocated and sanctioned will be realised under conditions that will assure them success. They grow after being seemingly dead, like a corn of wheat—"except it die it hath no life in itself."

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